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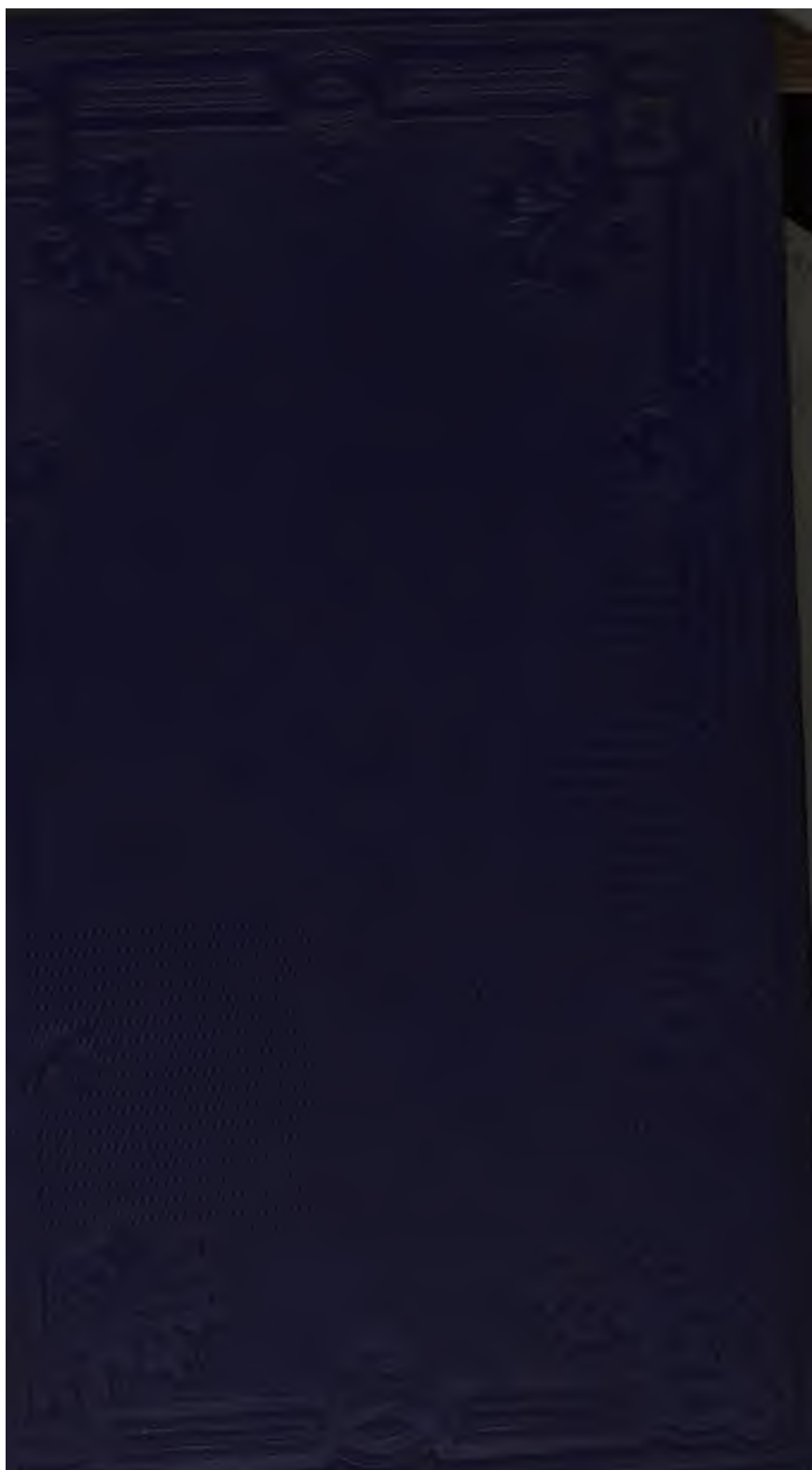
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BLACK MOSS.

A Tale by a Carn.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"MIRIAM MAY," AND "CRISPEN KEN."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

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1864.

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TO

SIR STAFFORD H. NORTHCOTE, BART., M.P.,

I am Privileged

TO OFFER THIS STORY.



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BLACK MOSS.

CHAPTER I.

UNDINE.

“It’s evven as a bethowt ma; it’s t’abbey bell likely that’s ringin’ away an’ away oop yander. Th’ loovin’ an’ th’ bonny lass then is geeand; puir, puir, yoong thing; weel, weel, bet it’s a gae sad set, hawivver, an’ a sorry—it is sooa.”

And Sawrey Knotts, the old sexton of Black Moss, came up out of the grave that he was digging, and rubbing his eyes—which said something more than did his words—and scraping off the heavy clay lumps that clung to his spade, the while, he muttered sadly to himself,

“It’ll be her graave I’s happen gittan ta deeg noo. There’ll nin* be left wick† amoong es ; there’ll nin be left wick.”

It was late on an evening in the early spring, nearing towards April, that the great bell was so tolling in the old tower of Black Moss Abbey.

The wild valley of Black Moss is probably, to the general traveller, about as little known as any in all Cumberland. Its streams have, however, it is well believed, a very tolerable name in the judicious regards of those who follow the angle in difficult places ; but, although the steep Raise that winds up through the gap into Red Moss, affords some of the finest and grandest scenery in the country, it is seldom visited, whilst the very considerable mountains that are grouped round the valley, are rarely climbed by others than the statesmen who live near the fells, and are dismissed with about one contemptuous sentence even in most of the more pretentious guide-books.

* None.

† Alive.

But although its waters have a sure place in the affections of fishermen, those who are given to "do" the mountains and the lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland, as they are sometimes "done" in kid gloves and shirt collars, are, by their own choosing, nearly strangers to the passes and the bridle-paths of Black and Red Moss.

Black Moss Tarn, a deep dark sheet of water covering most of the valley, and coming up close to the churchyard of the old church of S. Wilfrid, had that season overflowed, after the melting of the snow that had been gathering in great drifts throughout the winter, and after the long and heavy floods of the early spring. The rise of the waters, it was supposed by some, had generated a malignant typhoid fever, although other, and as likely causes, had been suggested. Many, even on the slopes above the dams, had fallen very sick, and on the coming of the warmer weather, many had died. Some homes were almost desolate. Whole families had been swept away; and there were none of them even left to shut up the

houses—cottages, untouched by the infection, were abandoned, the scared and terrified families hurrying away for awhile to such of their kindly neighbours in the fells as did not insist upon a too inexorable quarantine. Those even who had escaped, whilst so many were falling down about them, had seen with horror the progress of the awful scourge. It had got worse and worse; none got over it, until, as Sawrey Knotts the sexton said, it seemed only likely that no one would be left that had ever been seized.

But Gideon Cuyp, the undertaker of Black Moss, in the midst of the very brisk trade that he was driving, observed how he had long thought the place had become greatly over-populated, and that this visitation—which to his thinking was not because of the tarn or the drains—showed “haw lile* a mercifool Providence likes his fooak ta coom tagidther in oer girt croods.” Gideon Cuyp was always minded

* Little.

to cast about like this for such like causes, as it served the reputation that he had builded up for being well affected towards sacred things. And just then, too, his religious exhortations to the bereaved, led many to believe that from his being spared, his consolations were not without some special significance.

A physician, however, of some parts, who had been summoned with others to the abbey, had given it as his opinion that the fever had been generated by the waters of an old drain, that ran through the churchyard, having broken into a running stream, from which the people drank. But, although this was at once stayed under the directions of Gideon Cuypp himself, the fever only the rather went on spreading; and the undertaker, as he passed into the homes of those who were stricken, pointed upwards, and reverently murmured, "It's nowt ta dae we' th' draan; it's a joodgment, a telt ye, it's a joodgment."

The scourge at last had reached the abbey, and Undine, the only child of Sydney Lady

D'Aeth, had sickened. The worst symptoms very early began to show themselves. Many physicians came together, though their counsel availed nothing. The fire burned hotter and hotter. They did all that they knew, and once for a very little she rallied; but, whilst they were yet mocked with this hope, it was dashed away, and Undine's young life had gone out of her.

On the night that Sawrey Knotts had heard the bell, the corpse of Undine D'Aeth was lying on a bed in one of the upper rooms of the Abbey. The agony of the mother—who that morning had been admitted to the physician's hope that her child would live—was almost frenzied; and as the night went on—the first night that she had been all alone—her reason went wandering up and down amongst the bright belongings of the past. In the end, so was she moved, that she took the body—which was none the less beautiful in death than it had been in life—in her own arms, to her own bed, crying out in her torment—as those who are so left alone will—that she

and the dead should never be parted; and that that fair clay—which so soon would be no longer fair at all—should never be taken out of the clutch of her embraces.

Undine D'Aeth had been struck down only a little while before her intended presentation at Court. Many rumours of what she was had spread far beyond the genial critics in the valley of Black Moss, who were never wearied of pledging her in their "Measoores er beer," and even quite the highest life in London itself was talking of the new beauty who was coming from Cumberland to reign alone that year.

Wailing a low wail, which showed that some chords in her heart were sprung, and crouching over the marble loveliness that was so soon to be shut out of her sight for ever, the childless woman's tearing thoughts fought their way back to S. James's, and to the scene in which her child—this snatched-away child—was to have shone so soon, and so steadily, a star of stars. And then, as though she could see it all—all there before her as it would have been—

and as though she could hear in the whispering of a thousand voices her darling set over all pretenders as *the* peerless one, she could bear no more, and in almost a paroxysm of wild delirium she rang the bell that called her maid.

"Bring in her dresses, Wauchope; when she wakes she is going to the Queen. Why do you look so? Why—why do you stare? she *will* be waking presently."

"Yes, my lady," said the maid, who saw how it was with her mistress, and so set about that awful toilet without a word.

And after this sort the corpse was dressed, as it was meant the living girl should presently have been, with pearls in her waving golden hair.

"See to put a shawl about Miss Undine," said Lady D'Aeth with a startled look. "Keep her warm till the carriage comes round; we must be getting away early, or we shall be shut out of the line. Don't you feel how cold she is? My love must have got a chill. Ah," she burst out wildly, "I remember all about it now—she will never

be warm again—my sweet one is dead—dead. I shall be better, Wauchope, soon ; better now that these have come.”

And she pointed to the great drops that streamed down her cheeks on to the face of her child.

Whilst Lady D'Aeth and her handmaid were yet looking on, the memories of the childless woman, struggling to take her back over those eighteen years, catching at nothing that was not a new and a worse agony, and wondering how the grave might be cheated of its hardest prerogative, Minna Norman, known throughout the district as the niece and adopted child of Gideon Cuypp the undertaker, came in timidly and gently to try to offer some comforting words.

But the coming of Minna at that time, for many reasons that it were not difficult to set forth, only intensified the sorrows of Lady D'Aeth, opening up a fresh vein of anguish, unfolding before her eyes the terrible reality of her desolation.

The coffinmaker's child had been one of the very few girl-friends of Undine ; and,

although their positions from the first had been so little alike, and would probably have got to be less so, they had grown up, ramblers together on the hills and fells that stood round the valley of Black Moss, in the companionship of one another, without a confidence that was not maidenly, or a sympathy that was not pure.

It is true enough that most young girls of about eighteen have a great many confidences and sympathies among themselves other than those that are either maidenly or pure. But nothing of that immodest knowledge so generally wrapped up in the extras at "finishing" schools had throttled their innocence, or thrust itself in their way to say to them that the world they thought so passing fair was very foul. Nothing of this approved indelicacy had come near to them, to stagger and strangle their young hopes.

When the fever in the end had settled on the Abbey, and the parting came, they were in their freshness almost as sisters to each other. But, beyond this, which sufficiently called back so many charged memories of a

fair and a dark child, that used to seem sometimes like specks as they sat together on a far-off cairn, scarcely ever separated, for another and a stronger reason, Minna Norman's coming on that evening to offer sympathy herself, where none could comfort *her*, and where all thought of consolation seemed very nearly a mockery, was above all, and before all, a bitterness to bear.

"I know what you are here for to-night, Minna," said Lady D'Aeth, wildly, as she turned and faced the girl; "your uncle has sent you. He thinks my darling will want a coffin soon—yes, very soon—for they mustn't be kept who've died of *this* fever. A coffin, then—oh! God, must she, this pretty thing, poison the air, and turn to earth and dust? If I might—" sighed out the wretched woman, as she threw herself upon the corpse, "if I might only think of her as she is here now—no—no horrid worms. Oh! why do these thoughts of what must be, come like this to tear me? And you—you, Minna—you, whose hands have made wreaths for this golden hair,"—and she whispered

this in the girl's ear—"you, Minna, perhaps, will do the pinking in her shell."

Minna Norman, in the presence of these bursts of agony, said nothing. She believed the calm would come, but that it might not be hurried; and she knew, too, that whatever she at such a time could say, would not in any way avail, whilst it would very probably only make the present misery, of an utter abandonment to unchecked sorrowing, the worse.

For a few moments Lady D'Aeth stooped over the body vacantly, as though there was something dim and shadowy before her; and then, as if under an impulse, which seemed suddenly to have moved her, and to have settled into a fixed purpose, and an unalterable resolve, with her face for the instant bearing a fearful and unnatural smile, she left Minna Norman alone with the corpse in the room.

Lady D'Aeth then went to her desk, and with hysterical eagerness wrote off and sealed a letter; and, having sought with success, the direction of a firm of London under-

takers, the sombre magnificence of whose appointments gave them a name above any other of such furnishers in the trade, she returned to Minna, who was still sitting by the side of the dead, with Undine's chilled lips to her own.

The letter was delivered to Minna with the very strong expression of a wish that it might be posted that night.

"Yes, Minna," she said, quietly and softly, for the calm had come, as she wished her good night; "you and I, dear girl, will yet be able to think of our lost one as she was, and as she is here, lying unchanged, even to the great awakening, in her grave. I am not dreaming now. You think that she *must* crumble. You think that the sentence dust to dust will follow *her*—but I tell you, Minna—mad though you may think me now—that it need not, if you are only careful of that letter. Kiss me, Minna. You were very dear to her. I shall love you better even than I ever did before. Tell your uncle that I shall be glad to see him to-morrow. Look, Minna, look,

at me ; I am not what I was. I can speak of this parting now, almost without so bad a shudder, but still it's very, very hard," and she flung herself, moaning, on the marble bosom of her child.

Minna Norman, who could not compass the meaning of much that she had seen, crept noiselessly away, and went out to post the letter. She saw that it was addressed to a firm of London undertakers somewhere at the West-end of the town ; and as she was hurrying on, and close to the cottage where she lived, she was stopped by Gideon Cuyyp, who was coming out, he said, to seek her.

CHAPTER II.

GIDEON CUYP.

It is not, after any sort, a small thing to present the undertaker of Black Moss in any way to meet his merits. It was about the one thing that he liked best to take thought that he never was quite able to be understood. Indeed, Gideon Cuyyp, anticipating with much judgment the probability that his qualities and parts might at some time or other become prominent and curious objects of investigation and speculation, had been from his youth up at pains to appear to others such as he was not; and as he congratulated himself upon the success of his devices, it is at any rate due to him to put it on record at once, that his congratulations were entirely legitimate—that is, he had been all along successful

without ever being suspected of having saved, and had let no one into the knowledge of what he had either laid out or laid up. There might be those, he knew, who were concerned about his profits; but he was satisfied that they were not in the secret of his resources. Such as he had got he had gotten darkly; and as it had been acquired, so was it kept out of the sight of all men.

Gideon Cuyyp had come to settle in Black Moss, it might be about forty years before he takes any part in this history. He had worked out his pleasant and assuring calculations and observations at a distance, and was persuaded that the rate of mortality in Black and Red Moss, and the valleys around them, was high enough to make it worth his while to set up the centre of his trade there. But, beyond that, he had to this trade thrown out some branches; and for so little did he very decently put away the dead, that no competitor in the county could ever live near him. Up to the time of his coming to Black Moss he had been chiefly

found at Kendal, and only made opportune excursions with his latest tariff to the scene of any very sweeping epidemic. He always did these last offices for so much less than could any one else, that it was amazing to most how he could do them at all. Some, for whom he had buried a friend, concluded that there must somewhere be a loss; and this was a conclusion that brought much comforting assurance to Gideon Cuyp.

His presence at no period had been very inviting. His face was yellow and wizen, and was capable of diversified and unlimited contortion. But his character and instincts were not in any way reflected in his parchment skin. He was said to be only pleasantly ugly. And though he limped about perpetually, it seemed to have been forgotten that his gait was irregular.

Gideon Cuyp, however, looked chiefly to his manner, which was garnished with all the varieties and forms of sympathy necessary to one who had to do, "on the lowest terms for cash," a deal of mourning at short notice, as the best approach to his percen-

tages ; and in the conception and execution of this a considerable experience had advised him that he had chanced upon a vastly profitable staple of trade-grief. He readily made those about him believe that he cared a great deal for many things good, and commendable, and pure in themselves. It had been his chief business ever since he became a funeral furnisher—a business, too, that he pushed even more perhaps than he did the making of coffins, or the circulating of typhus, to divert suspicion from the one thing that he had set himself to do—and that one thing was the getting of money. It is not, however, true that he thought of nothing at all but hoarding his gains. He had thought of this, it might be, only about three-fourths of the time that he had lived—he had set aside the other fourth, with excellent discretion, to lead away any speculation in his affairs up to the impossibility of his ever having saved anything.

And he had done this, it should be said, without once making a slip. He had never had two stories as to what he made or did not

make. People believed that he worked very hard for very small returns ; and he had brought them to believe this without having once hesitated, and with a calm consciousness that he could at least outwatch all watchers. He had read in the lighter columns of the country papers of the ways and observances of those remarkable misers who were not given to burn candles ; who lived and died in dirt, and said they liked it ; and who did not even set about disguising that there must be a stocking full of guineas put away somewhere.

Gideon Cuyp had altogether given himself up to despising these miserable instances of ineffective sensitiveness. Indeed, the measure of his contempt for them and their hollowness was about proportioned to his devotion to his own masterly sagacity. Most of the money he had made was buried away in a hole with the seal of the grave upon it ; but there was nothing anywhere to lead to the suspicion that there had been, or would be, anything to bury. He had been at some pains that in his own home there might be

not even one accidental symptom of his having saved. He would at times slink away and shake himself with great good feeling by the hand, when it, by chance, reached him that this or that neighbour had happened to say "that Mr. Cuyp, who distributed so much in his benefactions, was probably living up to his income."

Now, to the thinking of Gideon Cuyp, this *was* strategy. The whole parish was astray. He had been sounded, and it was conceived that the bottom had been found. He only made a little, and gave away most of that to clothe the naked and feed the hungry. This was how his situation was interpreted by those around him. Cuyp thought public opinion in those parts to be an excellent thing. It was delicious to have taken them all in, whilst none of them knew that they had been taken in at all.

"A spend happen about a foorth ov what a meeaks," he would chuckle to himself, "an nin ov them bethinks thessels ov oother three. Weel, bet they is serious saft—they is hawivver."

It should be said that, within his own doors, the fiction of his own resources was wonderfully sustained. There was always a guinea for the asking, if there were either sickness or want at the end of the application. His name appeared amongst all the charities of the place. Bible annotators and commentators of great local celebrity, but not of corresponding means, could generally reckon upon his taking a copy or more of the heaviest of their offerings. The little ones in Black Moss were much affectioned towards the old man, and looked upon him as nearly always good for bulls' eyes; but even the sweet things that he gave to them were wrapped up in tracts, or in leaves out of Bible stories; and at Christmas he would often set a great Noah's ark before the longing eyes of that one who was the best reported of.

Yet to Gideon Cuyp the sight of his neighbours was mostly distasteful, if not always hateful. He never gave away a coin if the gift was not very sure of early recognition. His right hand and his left were

always in earnest consultation before either went, at any time, into his pocket after a grudged guinea. He had so many doubts about the authority of the Bible, that he refrained himself, except in public, when the eyes of his fellows were set on him, from The Book altogether; so that he might not, as he used to put it, under any temptation, add to his scepticism. Gideon Cuyp was in all things a living lie—a living lie who could look you full and fairly in the face, always hovering about where there were any dead, or any likely to die.

To trace his motives. He had indeed adopted Minna Norman, when a little child, for his own purposes, so that when she grew up she could minister to the outward show, in the midst of which she unsuspectingly lived. And then it had not escaped the calculations of the old man, if she were, after a while, as well-looking as she promised, there should be something down that need not, of any sort of necessity, all belong to her when she married. This, at least, was the way that he looked

at it—this was the use to which he was minded he would put her.

Gideon Cuyyp always had made it a serious and a particular matter to talk about his bankers when he could. He would give out, when the occasion served him, that the little that he had put away anywhere was in the Cockermouth Bank; so that if there were those who wanted to steal the little that was his, they would have to get into the Cockermouth Bank to steal it. No one, he used to fancy, would at all care to come to rob a man who did not keep about him or near him his own money. He was not going to let it be thought that there was a big bag hidden away up *his* chimney. So, whilst the effects that he kept in his banker's hands were something nominal, the great hoard that had so long been growing and gathering, was about ten feet down in S. Wilfrid's churchyard.

Years before the beginning of this history, a family grave had been opened, as it was then said, before being for ever shut up, to receive the remains of the last member

of a race. After he had been so put to rest at the top of his long line, the grave was to be closed. There was no one living, it was believed, with the right to follow him into that pit; and there would never be any more knocking against that sod till the crack of doom awoke the valley.

Now Gideon Cuyp, amongst other things, did not believe in the crack of doom. He did not believe that the last summons to the dead might come at any moment. He could mutter over the service for the burial of the dead to serve a purpose, but he did not believe in any Resurrection. He gave Noah's arks to the likeliest of the village lads; but he did not the less believe—to himself—that Noah was a myth, and the flood a fable. He did not believe in the possibility of the precious metals ever getting destroyed. In his own mind he made a little calculation, and backed the gold to outlast the "fervent heat." He was also of opinion that nothing could disturb a grave, other than a faculty; and as there were very clear instructions to put away in a coffin

the last of a line, the chances of there ever being a faculty asked for in this case were not worth considering.

This, at least, was the view that Gideon Cuyp took of it. So on the night of that day when the family grave had been filled in, he took a spade, and went out to the churchyard. In the darkness he worked on till he presently came to within a foot of the coffin lid, about ten feet it might be from the top, and there, with many emotions and much assurance, he buried away his darling gold.

As he was filling up the hole he took himself into his own confidence, and the communion was something on this wise :

“A is sick a terble free sort ov a mon,” he chuckled. “I likely live oop ta ma in-coome, ha! ha! I clean cap ’em, for wyah I don’t geea oop an doon wi a song ov th’ brass a meeaks. A hev saaved nowt—nae happen nit—th’ lile there is, hawivver, weel be varra coomfortable here—it weel sooa.”

And the little man, as he thought these

things, threw in the clay, and shuffled home, with a creed at last that he might give himself up to. And the creed was this—that there is nothing so easy, and that may be made so profitable, as to make fools.

For forty years, or thereabouts, once a week had Gideon Cuyp's advertisement in one or other of the county papers been, with very little variety, in these words:—

“Gideon Cuyp, of Black Moss, still continues to supply the best coffins at the lowest possible prices. In all cases he positively guarantees the comfort of the deceased, and economy to the survivors. Coffins not approved will be exchanged. By availing themselves of the services of G. C., the bereaved can see the features of the deceased up to the last moment.”*

Gideon Cuyp, after a good deal of casting about, had concluded that this could not be bettered. It might be affecting to many in some moods; whilst cheapness remained the chief feature in this procession of words.

He, at any rate, had found the advertise-

* The original of this advertisement has appeared in a Cumberland paper within the last few months.

ment not a little effective. His experience satisfied him that every touch went home somewhere. There were those mourners who, scarcely knowing in the first coming of their sorrow what they did—readily believed the speciality of so much comfort *with* so much economy to be wholly unparalleled; and those whose hearts, it might be, were very near breaking by the closing scene of some fair and well-loved thing, rose at the assurance that a dear face would not be shut out till the last moment.

However he came by it, no one did nearly such a trade in Cumberland as did Gideon Cuyp. His “best elm,” it is true, was not over seasoned; but then, as he would reason to himself, “wo in t’graave wes ta telt aloud that?” His “heart of oak” was green outsides; but then who was to accuse him when his warped and shrinking bargains were buried away? He, at any rate, greatly satisfied the survivors with everything that he did, from his very decent demeanour when measuring, up to the little discount that he threw off his bill.

It is true that his custom did not always

come to him legitimately. He was not always satisfied to wait till it came to him, without a struggle or without contriving. If it so chanced that the sanitary state of the country was anything remarkable, and so affected his trade as to make it perhaps a trifle dull, he was not without his remedy for this flatness in the mortality. A little travelling typhus was put into circulation; or he would call out some scarlet fever to bring about a better average.

And he made the call after this sort.

The clothes of a fever patient, generally condemned by the doctor to be burnt, were generally saved to do a further work by the care of Gideon Cuyp. He would get into the house—and he was much sought in most houses—and having got there, with excellently well counterfeited concern, he would plead that something might very easily be left, even from the burning, that would yet carry infection. He was ready to get rid of this risk. He would provide for their burning up. He would urge that he never caught anything himself, and if he

did, it were better that he should be sacrificed rather than that the county should suffer. And, taking this tone, he always prevailed. Once secure of the suit of death, he would dispose of it in some remote district, on very reasonable and easy terms—for Gideon Cuyt never incontinently gave away anything. So would his trade be braced, and look up again.

But, beyond all this, his character for active benevolence had been to him in another point of view a remunerative thing. He had consented to be churchwarden; and this was a great stroke, for it brought him about the church, which thing he found in many ways to be desirable. Then he had consented to nominate the sexton; and with a happy assumption of indifference, without appearing to want the distinction, he had been unanimously elected one of the Inspectors of Nuisances. Now an Inspector of Nuisances, who is not above his work, has to deal with many things that are not nice, to touch many things that are not savoury, and to smell many things that are

not sweet. But Gideon Cuyp did not trouble himself to think about what he might have to see, or smell, or handle; he was only concerned with the knowledge that the health of the place was in a measure in his hands; and in his hands he was minded that it should remain. He had soon found it easy to get the other members of the Board to leave unclean matters pretty much to him; for he found it to be very necessary indeed that, with his engagements, he should not be interfered with. Yet it could not be said that he *asked* for the authority with which he was covered. It was thrust upon him; and he took it with a diffidence and hesitation that showed to what greatness he might have reached as an actor, had he not been so great as an undertaker.

On one occasion when Sawrey Knotts the sexton was at his work, he discovered that an old conduit which, many years before, had drained the land waters, which often settled in the churchyard, had, after a heavy flood, become so filled that a way had been forced into a stream which ran close by,

and which stream supplied Black Moss with water. The sexton, although by no means a total abstainer, had been straightway so appalled, that he cast down his spade, and, thick with the clay that hung about him, he went to report what had occurred, and what a grievous peril the place was in, to Gideon Cuyp, the Acting Inspector of Nuisances.

Gideon Cuyp would not have been the very considerable person that he was, had he not seen in an instant how this might be worked. And he was quite up to the occasion, and to the demands that were made upon his caution, and he betrayed nothing of that which was in circulation within him.

“Weel, weel, Sawrey, it mud sartanly be stooped at yance; ya’ve doon reet* enoo ta com ta ma—ya mudn’t be gittan meeakin a serious din about it, er there’ll be likely a saad set; it’ll fritten away a conny few ov th’ fooak, an there’ll be happen a gae mash oop.”

* Right.

So Sawrey Knotts, seeing no more than it was meant he should see, did as he was bidden of Cuyp, and held his peace; and afterwards, acting under the undertaker's directions, diverted the course of the drain where it had made the breach, and then went back to his work at the hole he was digging for mortality.

When the evening of that day had come, Gideon Cuyp went out, and was till midnight busied on a great business between the churchyard drain and the stream.

"A tak it that'll dae," he said to himself at last, as he flung down his spade.

He had this joy so full upon him because he had been undoing, with some success, the work that Sawrey Knotts had done in the day. He had made the foul waters of the drain to mingle again in the mountain stream; and there was a neatness about the way in which he had finished the job that pleased him mightily.

"A sall dae a girt traad* joost noo. I's

* Trade.

inspector — these girt fools dae ma jobs better an weel, an' I'll see they com ta ex ni questions."

As he so comforted himself he wiped away the sweat from his brow; and, having taken heart about his prospects when he thought of the scourge he had contrived, and making in his own mind his arrangements to meet it, he went home.

It should be conspicuously set out here that amongst the many benevolences which were contributed by Gideon Cuyp to society, and were always freely enough at the service of suffering at Black Moss, was his aptitude for healing. It served his purpose to have this sort of reputation. Even if his remedies did not save lives, there was yet this way of looking at them, they might fill his coffins.

So, as the value of his specifics became known, his sovereign salves were much sought after; and many came to him for his plasters, and liniments, his cordials, herbs, eye waters, elixirs, and balsams. Cripples, with convenient and with continual faith,

rubbed their joints with the oils that he got out of the mosses, and with his decoction of goose grass. The doctor, who was very needy, could not at all afford even to save for nothing; he must have *his* consideration; the most astounding or miraculous gratuitous cures would not have found him in victuals; and seeing what came to Gideon Cuyp by the use and abuse of his drugs, he calculated that *he* could afford to give them away.

Not that he ever wastefully threw away even his physic. If he happened to have seen—and in the seeing of such things he was not behind others—that a case was hopeless, he came to the bedside to pray a little, and to speak words of assurance; said he saw improvement in his patient; prescribed nothing; and went his way to calculate what he could bury that “party” for; and whether the very low figure, with a margin of profit, could defy the competition that he well knew would swallow him up if he made any mistake.

He had a way with him of taking the

measure of his patients at once, in a glance—that is, the measure of their disease, and the measure of their bodies. After that very profitable night's work between the drain and the stream, he suddenly found out a great many full habits amongst those who came to him for his medicine and advice.

“Ah, a can discern haw it is wi' ya. Ya meeaks o'er mooch bloode; an' ya soop o'er mooch ov strang ale. I knaa varra weel yar'd be a site th' better if yar sooped wattle.”*

So the mass of them put themselves on water, the water of the stream, for his pestilential words were not thrown away.

Then after they had many of them given over drinking the strong ale, there came the first beginning of that fever which emptied the place and filled his pockets.

One of the physicians, who had been called into Black Moss Abbey when Undine D'Aeth had been nearing her end, was a shrewd man, not only of much skill, but much common sense. He always at once

* Drank water.

attacked such smells as there might be, when he was professionally invited to deal with or account for an epidemic—when he was assured about the smells, he always went straight to the water.

“Lady D’Aeth,” he said, the first morning that he came, after that he had taken a survey of the situation, “I should be glad if I can have a glass of the water that is generally drunk hereabouts.”

The water was brought to him; he poured it into a bottle and carried it away with him.

“It is quite as I thought,” he muttered to himself when he had made his analysis. “Nothing could account for this combination but a churchyard.”

He next sought out the Inspector of Nuisances, and was at once introduced to Gideon Cuyp. Now it was soon sufficiently clear to Cuyp that the physician had already made up his mind, and that he was persuaded he knew how this fever had come about. It never entered into the undertaker’s plans to do anything to disturb such conclusions; it was, he had always

found in his experience, the surest way of getting people to cleave to them ; and he did not at all care that the physician should cleave to this one.

So when the doctor had said that an inspection of the drain should be made at once, even before that noon, Gideon Cuyp only bowed himself, and went out at once to find some hands.

Presently the work was begun, the physician the while looking on. The breach was found, and very small it was.

"Hey, mon, bet it's evven them rats agin," dropped in Gideon Cuyp, with great presence of mind, as they came upon the hole that he had made.

"No doubt, Mr. Cuyp," said the physician, who altogether believed it *was* the rats.

And then after the rats had been, at the instance of Gideon Cuyp, sufficiently held to account for the mischief they had done, the physician expressed his confidence in the worst being over. But, almost as he spoke, the worst had reached the Abbey ;

and when as the night came on, the bell in the old tower tolling out, announced to Gideon Cuypp the brisk progress of his hellish work, the thought came into him that he could not afford to stop short now in that which he had set himself to do.

“This sput hes bin for a conny bit a serious deal o’er healthy; an’ ma traad is ivver sooa mooch oer girt a yan for owt ta mell* on’t.”

A week later, after the physician had gone away, and Undine D’Aeth was dead, Gideon Cuypp one night, when it had been some time dark, went out into a little yard that there was behind his house, and cautiously and noiselessly began to grope about for something.

“They sud be behint this girt steean;† they canna weel be skifted.‡ Neea, neea. I’ve fint§ ’em—six aald rats, gae welkers an’ awe. Sooa coonnin’|| they’ll be tied ta knaa whaar th’ are when a let them oot joost noo, I’ll warn¶ ma. Soom choorch folk canna

* Meddle.

† Stone.

‡ Shifted.

§ Found.

|| Cunning.

¶ Warrant.

ivver kip their hands off what they be olas* callin' varmin; an' ses as they canna see what rats wer meeak'd for; an' this wi' soommut about God meeakin' owt for a weese contrivin'."

As Gideon Cuyp was muttering this, he took up a cage full of old rats. He had caught a great many in the churchyard drain, but had discharged the young ones, as in their youth they might very well not know their way about, if they were fetched from their homes. Gideon Cuyp's experience had always been that a clever and a thoughtful rat will, of a certainty, find his way back to the place he came out of, if he has given to him at all a fair chance. So he went down towards the church when it was getting late, and turned them into the stream just outside the churchyard wall, where there was only a little earth between it and the drain. The next morning showed him that the rats had not been dull, or unworthy of the work that he had set them to do. They had demonstrated their domesticity; and

* Always.

once again the foul water of the drain was emptying its poison in the mountain stream.

“It’s varra strange that Guy Melchior isn’t gittan a toorn* at th’ fever—varra strange—it fairly caps ma; its gittan’ ameeast ta be teem, too; he is late enoo ta be in ma way.”

So thought Gideon Cuyp as he limped back to his house.

Now Guy Melchior was the Vicar of Black Moss.

Gideon Cuyp, when he had so met Minna Norman with the letter that Lady D’Aeth had said was urgent, bade her trust it to him, as it was too late and too damp for her to be abroad. When she had left him, he was minded to see to whom it was going; and he took it into his very own room, where all the ghastly signs of his horrible trade hung round about the walls, from a pageant with feathers at a fancy price, to a child’s funeral by contract.

When he saw the lines outside that letter,

* Turn.

a smile spread from his nearly livid lips, and seemed to light up his contorted features; but then those were emotions that it was not meant the world should see.

“Varra tidy fooak, mebbie,” he almost hissed out, as he took in all the situation; “bet th’ opposition meet nit be sooa weel. A bethink ma this bit ov meeschief is likely ta be stickin’ in th’ properest hends.”

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH THE UNDERTAKER OF BLACK MOSS
HAS SOME CONSCIENTIOUS SCRUPLES, BUT
OVERCOMES THEM.

It only wanted about twenty minutes to the closing of the mail—for the coach came through the valley for the letters at night—when Gideon Cuyp, with the enclosure that was marked “urgent” in his hands, was beginning to get lost in the full breadth of the situation. His fingers did not cease to itch, or his whole body to get hot, as he read those lines which might so lead to his undoing.

If it should seem that the instincts of this man are nothing pleasing, and if it is not to be concealed that the objects and desires of his life are chiefly, and on many grounds, to be abhorred, yet, as he sits there,

his lips are moving, and it may be heard that he is asking for a measure of justice to honour the motives of his hesitation—for up to this present he has refrained from laying hands upon that seal. It is justice that he wants, and he should surely have it. Let it be said that he did waver and fidget in his chair, and balance it on its back legs, whilst the second hand might perhaps have been going round five times—not one journey more; and then the perspiration on him was dried up; he fidgeted no longer in the place where he was sitting; his chair stood firmly on all its four legs; the thing that he had for a little season hesitated to do, was done now—it was all done; that short sharp struggle against such odds. He had quieted the restless doubts that had been holding him back; and in an instant it had come into his mind how he would deal with such scruples as these.

Gideon Cuyyp had indeed never tampered with a seal before that night—not at all because the temptation to do it had presented itself and been rejected, but simply because

up to that time he had never faced the temptation.

But he conceived it to be very necessary to face it now, for in his hands he held the proof that his privileges were going to be invaded. He looked at it in this way—that it was intended to pull him down, to ruin him, to let strangers pluck him away, to crush out his trade; and it even might come to be seen that he was not nearly so cheap as he had been accounted. He reasoned that it was one thing to break into sealed confidence, only because a man was curious; but he took it to be another thing to get to see a mischief when a mischief was threatened. And Gideon Cuyp did not doubt but that he was badly threatened by this thing before him; or that he would be grievously standing in his own way if he ever let it get into those hands that it was meant for.

So he concluded that he would stop this peril to himself at once—for was it not to go to others high up in his own trade? If this went through the post, he could see his business, his monopoly, slipping clean away from him.

Perhaps, as he thought, if these gentlemen were to find out, which was more than likely, that mortality in Black Moss and in the districts round was so far above the corrected average, they would be doing something that might root him out—they would, it was only probable, be striking out a branch—and such of his inventions as he had been passing off as new would then the rather seem to be stale and old.

Then, what should he do with his great stock of green elm and rotten oak? A revised tariff might be set up along with seasoned wood; and all these thoughts of how the future might serve him were quite over much for him. His crooked body rolled up as the picture mocked him. His breath was fetched shorter and shorter, and he gulped down his emotions. He had justice when that second hand was going round those five times. But he has flung away his title to it now. A new and a fresh crime is on his hands, for the violated letter is trembling close by the side of the candle's light.

“ A—A wes a lile while, though, meeakin’ oop ma’s meend—I wes tried a sorry bit; bet it wes reet ta messel ta dae th’ job.”

This at least was how Gideon Cuyp excused to himself the felony; and he was very sure that the way in which he walked was clean. Nor did he think indifferently well of his resolution when he had read the letter. If outside there had been that at all to move him, he glared at the lines inside. He hitched himself up, as though some of that intelligence, which was generally handy, had at this crisis failed him. He curvetted in a circle, and wrung his hands, and limped in a frenzy about his little room. He read it again and again, but there were the terrible words which told him that there were better men than himself in his own trade. He felt that he could in a measure have borne to know this, if their pretensions were not to be builded up with ‘their feet upon his neck. He was no longer to be in Black Moss chief amongst the undertakers. Some one had learnt that even as a funeral furnisher he was not nearly first. Where

was it to end, if those who were so much greater than he were to be fetched up to Black Moss? He could scarcely bear to think how very nearly they were coming; and they knew a secret, too, that must be good for coining gold. They must have been getting it in heaps, whilst he had been only sweating it out of wet wood. He had been then there many years a palterer, a beaten man, a pettifogger, a touter; and as he saw it all now, he did not cease to take into his mouth abominable oaths.

"It mudn't be doon, an' what's meear, it canna be doon! It canna that! It's a girt plot; an' it's nowt else ta fash* oos awe!" he snivelled out. "An it's summut worse, or I's meestak-in, ta rob th' graave; an' th' God that's away and away oop yonder," he went on blaspheming, "wont abide that!"

If Gideon Cuyyp by any chance could then have remembered any prayer that he had ever heard, it is not wholly unlikely that he might have prayed it. But in

* Do, or ruin.

any case, in whatever form the cry might have gone up, it would have been something very like a cry for a considerable grant of vengeance on the inconveniently inventive West-end firm.

But anything wholly impromptu in this way was not in his line. As he could not so tax his memory at all, he cursed. The words that his mother sixty years before had taught him to pray had long since been choked off. He thumped great thumps upon himself. He threw out his thin arms as though some strong fancy was helping him to the belief that he was pounding to little bits the London undertakers.

“ Wyah didn’t a bethink me ov this? Wyah hev a bin sick a marpie? an’ then it’s *them* I sud hev happen crooshed.”

And over the bitter recollection of such a lost opportunity something very like to tears welled out of his sunken eyes.

Now this was one of Gideon Cuypp’s weaker moments. These intervals had occurred to him, it is true, before; but it will not be needed to record many here. It was rare,

indeed, when anything moved him as this had; that must be very bad that could take of him such a hold as had this. He very frequently managed to see, that in the darkest or unlikeliest place there was at least a snug and a warm spot where his own interests could stretch themselves and bask; and out of the ills and calamities of other people he usually contrived, after some sort, to advantage himself. In this matter his affected sagacity was soon over the shock and out of its troubles.

“Hey, mon! bet what a gae fool I’s bin!” he said, getting himself together. “Sartanly, I’s nit geean ta send these leens ta dae a meeschief. Nooa, nooa, didn’t they coom ta ma for soom weese end; an dang ma, bet I’s nit sick a sad silly as nit ta claaime * ’em. It’s likely trew † enoo that nowt’s doon. that’s nit a weesdom; bet this pooder is a terble girt thing ta hev fin-ded oot, it is hawivver; an if a is happen gittan a lile bit aald, I’s nit feeble,

* Stop.

† True.

or daft, or seekly—a canna bethink ma it hes coom'd o'er late—I canna that."

And Gideon Cuypp, when he thought of this, and that he might not be altogether what he was, threw himself into his best form; nor could he be persuaded that death had any hold of him then. He was, he believed, much as he had been when he came into the world; that which should some day kill him was showing none of its signs. So he passed himself up and down before his glass, and in his skin and in his mind he was not a little comforted.

Gideon Cuypp was now sure that he could even read those lines aloud; for would not every word, as he came upon it, tell him of the great future that was so surely spreading out before him? He put up the letter very near to the light, so near that it was almost scorched; but he was himself a good deal the hotter of the two when he had seen what was in it:—

"Lady D'Aeth presents her compliments to Messrs. Hattban and Hurse, and having heard of their '*Powder for the Preservation*

of the Dead,' now writes to beg that Messrs. Hattban and Hurse will, on the receipt of this, send some trustworthy and competent person, skilled in the use of this powder, to Black Moss Abbey immediately."

This was what had so disturbed the peace of mind of Gideon Cuyp—that there should be a powder with any such properties, and that he, so high up in his trade, sweeping away as he did the dead in that county, in his hearses, should have never yet offered it for sale.

"There'll be joost teeme ta nap th' maail, a tak' it, an' altre th' shaap er this a lile," said Gideon Cuyp, as he sat him down to write another letter of a different tone to Messrs. Hattban and Hurse.

Now, from all that had come out, Hattban and Hurse were a cut above him, and he knew it; but he did not know that their chief engagements were generally in Westminster Abbey or S. George's Chapel. He was not going to write humbly, or as a craven. If he did not put away the same quality in mahogany or velvet, their name

did not ring, as did his, through a whole county.

And the other letter that he wrote was this:—

“GENTLEMEN,

“I will thank you to send me here, at your earliest convenience, the necessary quantity of your esteemed powder for the preservation of a young female, who has just died of a fever, with full directions as to use, &c. &c. You will, of course, invoice it to me, with the usual trade allowance. It would be all the safer if I got it by return. To prevent delay, I beg to refer you to two well-known London houses, who are the agents there for my improved air-tight shell, and who can satisfy you that I have been established here forty years.

“I remain, Gentlemen,

“Your faithful Servant,

“GIDEON CUYP.

“Messrs. Hattban and Hurse.

“P.S. Be pleased to advise me if there is any extra discount to the trade by taking a large quantity.—G. C.”

And after this was written out, away went the little man to put it into the post. He was satisfied that now such as were Hattban and Hurse would be no longer greater than was he. But he was cautious even over the return of his confidence. He could not remember that before the greatest strokes which he had made he had been ever carried away.

"I weel hev ni troostworthy person frae th' like er sick fooak ta be coomin' here. Nooa, nooa, I won't that."

And so did he quiet himself as he went back to his home, and sat him down to think over that which had been, and that which might be.

"Isn't ma puir aald neb fairly raank!"* he whispered, with a little whisper, as he pressed his hands with all his strength about his temples. "If this toorns oot a lile kindly, though I's nowt er a glootton for th' brass, I sall be like to be o'er joyful, I sall that; an' noo," he said, "ta kindle a bit er fire wi' this." And as he spoke

* Full.

he held the rifled letter in the candle's flame.

When he was satisfied that nothing of it remained, with his old head full—fuller even than he had allowed to himself—he shuffled away to act out the scene to the end with his child.

"I a deal ov teems telt Minna that a hoped a sudn't for a while be deein; bet noo a canna affoord ta be in any hoorry—a can't sooa." And he stopped on his way to the parlour to make a little calculation. "Hey, what a serious site er teem I'se bin at this lile tinny geeam! Why, I'se clean capped if a canna meeak' ma a deal er hoondreds noo where it once o'er tak'd ma ta meeak' as many tens. An a can ex owt, an fooak too, weel gimma* owt; for th' like er sick pooder geeans clean th' heart. There's now't ta tooch yon in a gae lock† er fooak."

And Gideon Cuyp, smothering down emotions which for a second time that night had been almost too much for him, went to sit for awhile with Minna Norman. He

* Give me.

† Lot.

had been ruffled and overset; but now he was going for a little season to say and to do smooth things.

Gideon Cuyp had never varied to her whom he had made his own. Before Minna Norman he had refrained himself from breaking out, or breaking down, as he had that night. Before her he never appeared other than as he was not. He had left nothing undone, from the first day she came into his hands, that it was right and fit he should do for her. She, at least, knew all that even any town girl could have needed to know. In far-away Black Moss she had learnt more than a little of most things; but only of such things as do not soil in the learning. She could sing and she could sew. She could do the pinking for the undertaker's coffins, and at tapestry work she was nothing behind. Never, too, did any broad Westmoreland or Cumberland slip from her tongue.

"She's a reeal bonny lass, an' a trew, raank in awe manner er booke larnin', an' sooch-like; bet she canna bide a wrong

thowt, nor owt that isn't cleean. She'd tak' ni harm if she heard th' worst, for she doesn't knaa a feelthy thing. Fit enoo' is th' gae lass ta be wed ta th' best and th' girttest—she is sooa."

This was how Gideon Cuyp, after some experience, had appraised her. Nor did she look to carry a lesser value than he put upon her.

Minna Norman always read to him before she left him for the night; and so had they knelt down—perfect innocence side by side with the well-tutored lie—and she had asked of God to bless them both. To her seeming there never was a better listener about prayer-time than was Gideon Cuyp. On that night he was not to be hindered from falling early on his knees.

"Minna, lass, isn't it gettin' a lile late? Canna we preea noo?"

"Why, what's the matter, uncle? It's only quite early. You didn't forget to post the letter?"

"Th' letter's reet enoo; bet ma puir aald neb sims a bit stoopid ta-neet, lass; an

I bethowt ma I'd be geean ma ways ta bed; let's ta th' goode words; for I tak' it we've a site ta be full er thanks for, a site; an' it's often ma neb doesn't seem ta be si beeg, that it cud be gittan beeger for owt that meet be wantin' ta crappen* int't."

"You're not ill, uncle?" asked Minna, anxiously, as she nestled close to him and put her hand upon his head.

"Nooa, nooa; nowt at awe er kind. What's ta da wi' ya tae be thinkin' I'se geean ta be sorry?" And this was almost roughly spoken, for he was not at his ease. Had he not a great work to do before it could be afforded that he should be ill?

"I wes likely o'er vexed," he said, softly, as he returned her caress, his hand the while straying into her brown-black hair—"a wes likely o'er vexed when a bethowt ma of th' sad ooman oop yonder, an'—an'—puir Undine."

He was at least quite himself when he told her this lie.

* Creep.

They neither for a little spoke; and then she looked up into his face and said—

“I believe it will kill her, uncle.”

He answered her nothing, and she went on to tell him that, if he went to bed, she should not stay up.

Now that was of all things just what he wanted. The long night's rest that he told her he meant to have was just a whole night all to himself to calculate, when there was nothing stirring, what might be to him about the money value of this wonderful powder.

And so Minna Norman took up The Book and read to the old man, and prayed a pretty child's prayer for him, and for her—it had almost been written with him.

“It's varra fine,” he said, piously, as he got on to his feet again; “serious fine; bet I don't knaa when that aboot nit drifting oos into temptation ivver capped ma sooa afoore. I's cleean capped wi' it—I is that.”

“Yes, uncle, and yet all this, which is so

beautiful, is so often taken so coldly, only as a matter of course; but it isn't a matter of course at all. You don't take it coldly, unky, do you? There, that will do." And she put her hand upon his mouth, for he was going to pet her. And perhaps, too, he might have seen that her eyes were full—full about him. She was yet outside the great suspecting circle. She believed that in what he was she had her answer to her prayers. Her simplicity had none of it yet been "finished" by experience or school.

Gideon Cuyp opened his arms to her, and got for himself an extra kiss for this little bit, as he knew he would. There they stood; and they had both taken on to their lips the same sublime and awful words. The one, who from her life seemed ripe to be an angel; the other, who from his, seemed only possible to pass into a devil.

He had left her, and he was alone in his little room. Presently the house was still. He knew that there were none to watch him now.

“Aye, it’s what a telt ta messel’. A wes ivver curious-like—a wes keen tempted.”

And he sat him down, and began with a great greed his schemes and his calculations.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH GIDEON CUYP PERSUADES HIMSELF
THAT HE IS "A GREAT CREATURE."

GIDEON CUYP so sat on there for hours, till the small hours had come and gone; and even until the sheets were filled, and looked heavy with the many gold-bearing figures that had started out of his fevered brain.

His trade, when he looked back upon that which was gone, and upon that which he had garnered, had, beyond any sort of doubt, afforded to him for a goodly number of years, on the whole, some very even, and not inconsiderable successes. But whenever he had counted up his gains, it had nevertheless always been a great and a grievous trouble to him that his hoard had not got into a lump at once. Gideon Cuyp, indeed,

nothing objected to "quick returns;" but "small profits" were an abomination to him. When he thought of these things, something, he concluded, in his system, must be very wrong somewhere. He had gone on gathering, but he had not with a spring waxed well to do. Perhaps he had been tied and bound with scruples; he could not, however, remember being either so tied or so bound. Perhaps, too, he had loosely forgiven some their debts; but then, whilst he reproached the weakness that could have forgiven any one anything, he came upon the posted-up consideration that was at the bottom of their release. Look at it as he might, he was only able to see that he had never made a great, a towering *coup*. He had beggared some few; but then they had been nearly broken before he touched them. And as he now reflected and chafed, he could not tell why he had missed so much; for he was only just to himself when he allowed that there was nothing hard that he had ever stopped short at. And even now, with all the consolation that he could get out of this

great, sweeping total of selfishness—with all the past spread out before him—he was very sure that he had lived for nothing. He was well over sixty when he so persuaded himself that all his life through he had been doing nothing.

Gideon Cuypp would not come to think that he was old; nevertheless he knew he was no longer young. He could keep stirring about as well as he had ever stirred; and he had from his youth up refrained himself from any of those things which get into the blood and are not to be got out of it. He had never coveted any man's wife, or any man's port. Those fleshly sins were not his sins. Never had he been full of illicit love or strong drink. In all that he was whole; and when he thought upon his soundness, he believed that he easily might reach a hundred years. And now he had so vast a matter upon his hands that he could not at all afford to die. That which had opened up to him under that broken seal would take a young man's life to be quite worked out; and that he had not this young life was what

haunted him now — haunted him, too, whether he would or no.

“I canna be skifted yet. I’s fairly doon nowt—nowt; only I saall tak’ this girt secret wimma; I saall, hawivver, an’ I’s nit sooa aald neither. I’s only beginnin’ ta deea owt ta-day; there’s nin that knaa aboot this partictlar bonny pooder. I’s capped if there be nit Sawrey Knotts yonder, a terble deal aalder than a is messel’—a terble deal; an’ he started ta deeg afoore ivver I coom’d. If a cud only kip wick, wick till there wesn’t a blessed body left for ma pooder. I bethink ma it meet* happen dae th’ job if I wes joost ta start preeain, ta be wick till I’ve putten away a serious site meear er th’ brass. I bethink ma a deal meet be doon—I dae sooa—a gae lock in twenty year, if I cud live anudther twenty year; happen Minna wud ex aboot it for ma—I cudn’t offer messel’. I knaa th’ lass wud likely putten it in her preears a chaance teem.”

Gideon Cuyp, when he had so bethought him that he would very surely do this, got

* Might.

up with a start that told how much he was relieved, and set open the shutters of his room. When he had so done, the full, bright light of another day fell warmly and pleasantly upon him.

"Wo, if it isn't seven by th' clock, it is, hawivver," he said, looking at the time-piece; "an' a haven't bin ta ma bed at awe.* Bet then a likely nivver deed sooch a neet's job as this afoore — nivver. It's this farncy† payin' job that soots ma. I'll olas be able ta ex a deecal' meear—a serious site meear than it'll pay ma ta tak'. 'Mr. Cuypp' — that's messel' — it'll be, 'hev a bit a peety, an' let ma hev th' pooder cheeap;' an' a lile, for th' matter a' that, they'll be gettin', sartanly; bet it wont be varra cheeap, a reckon—it wont that. Bet then, a caan weel enoo coom doon a lile, for them as feels th' meeast, olas cooms doon we th' brass th' best."

So had he been busied all that night through, with the great business of finding out what he should ask for the preparation

* All.

† Fancy.

that he presently was minded he would sell, and what he might take. He would get all that he could; and he proposed that those who were well-to-do should make it up to him for those who were not. With those thoughts upon him, the old man was occupied in setting himself and the room in order, before that Minna Norman should be calling him to breakfast. He had scarcely got himself straight before he heard her about, and she came running in looking as fresh as did that morning.

“And has uncle’s night’s rest done him good, and cured his poor, dear old head?” she asked, storming his knee the while, and patting his parchment face with her little hands; “for do you know I once thought I heard you walking about in the night, and that you said, ‘faverite childers* moost be on th’ seeam scaal as th’ fadthers an’ mudthers; they’ll evven tak’ a deeal ov pooder, bet then there’ll nivver be a seexpence oot ov harpy releases.’”

Minna Norman had been ordered not to

* Children.

talk as those about her did ; but at any other time Gideon Cuyp would not have been angered had he been so mocked, for the manner and the matter of Minna's words altogether fitted him. Now, however, he did not nearly like it. He began to see that some time in the night he had forgotten himself, and that over his figures he must almost have shouted. But if he had after such a sort so greatly slipped when it was night, he could well be set right now that it was day. Therefore he caused himself to smile, and running at her playfully made answer—

“An’ then it’s varra sure that a wesn’t messel’ in ma sleeap, wesn’t it? an’ I’ve gittan neea pooder—nin bet ma’s doctor’s stooffs.”

So did Cuyp put into the girl’s mouth just the words that he wanted to be there ; and so did he lead her mind away from thinking that he had been shouting about any powder, other than in his sleep.

“Why, of course I know that, uncle ; for it wouldn’t be a bit like my old unky here to talk like that ——”

"Trew — trew, lass," and he kissed her.

"For you know," she went on, very gently and fondly, "you never charge half so much, do you, when little children are taken away from fathers and mothers who love them very badly?"

And to this, in pantomime, Cuyp answered as she would have him answer. If ever he was a thought maudlin it was over such scenes as these; and now he could not give over smoothing her hair: nor did he cease to chuckle out a low chuckle that sounded very tender and real.

"And then," she broke in again, "you often tell me that my pinking must not be any the worse because you mean to charge a little less; and I was quite sure that this old unky here must be dreaming. Yes, I'm certain of it," and her bright, soft, soul-lit eyes sparkled with unalterable love and trust; "for you are a very great deal too good and kind, ever to think such hard things when you are awake. Everybody everywhere says of you that you care too little about

yourself. But then, you know—don't you—that you'll get your reward?"

"Whaar — whaar, lass, is a ta be gettin' it?" put in the old man, impatiently, for it had just struck him that some of his neighbours might be going to give him a purse. "Oh, a sooppose it's oop yander ya be meanin'," and, with a sneer that he scarcely was at any pains to hide away out of sight, he pointed heavenward; "bet if mappen that's weel enoo ta end wi', a don't want ta be geean mas ways amoongst th' spurrits yander joost noo."

"No, uncle, it isn't that; I know what you want, you want to be ready——"

"An' it's akin ta th' trewth that a isn't —nooa, isn't at awe—," burst in Cuyp, who was forgetting the discipline that he should always be under; for he was not thinking of that long journey that he must presently take. "An' it's nooa goode for ma ta be-think messel' a is."

Then, after this, he got his arms about her, and made her believe that it was because of her he was so little ready to start.

And then, too, his voice shook, and he lurched so much, that she thought he would have fallen upon his head. At last, as he moved up and down before her, he was just able to say, "A moost leeve,* Minna, for th' saak ov ya, ma bonny yan, for th' saak ov ya. Do'st ivver ex that—that a mayn't be takken joost noo?"

"Every morning and every night I pray that, uncle."

"Haw lang, Minna, dae ya ex that I may be stoppin'?"

"I leave that to God. He knows best what is time enough; and whether He shall call us away to Him to-morrow, or to-day, or in ten years, or in twenty——"

"Aye, aye, Minna, a bethink ma twenty meear year might happen dae; bet an' odd yan or sooa, for th' matter ov that, wuddn't be amiss. It's neet for messel', ma bonny yan, it's evven——"

"Oh, I know it's for me,"—and she came round softly to the front of him under his arm—"it's so like you, uncle; but there,

* Live.

now, you mustn't do that; don't cry, or you'll make me cry too." And she wiped away the counterfeit tears that were coming apace, and so fondly coaxed Cuyp away from his thoughts to his breakfast.

"A sall be doin' a meeschief, a sall that; a sall be lettin' it awe oot, if soa be I's geean on like this, mootterin' ta messel'," soliloquized the undertaker, with some fear of trouble that might be near upon him, as he limped down to the Abbey that morning to keep his appointment with Lady D'Aeth. "Bet I's seeaf enoo, noo; th' wench bethinks her it's a dreeam a wes a shoutin' in."

And as he so comforted himself, he drew out of the head-quarters of his mourning apparel the black gloves which he always carried about him, and showed in his hands whenever he paid a visit of trade grief; and beating with the kid upon his thighs he entered the grounds of Black Moss Abbey.

His name was taken up. He was not kept waiting; he had hardly put his left hand into black before Lady D'Aeth came down to see him. When he had followed

her into the octagon library, which was the room of business, she motioned that he should sit him down; and then, after a little seeking for those words that would not kindly come, she said, as calmly as she could, "It is very good of you to be here. Perhaps you know that I gave our Minna a letter to post last night; and it was about that letter, Mr. Cuyp, that I wish to speak to you this morning."

The undertaker at this beginning bowed himself very low, and shuffling, with some danger to his seat upon his chair, was in this way delivered of his answer.

"A tak' it that yo, ma lady, weel dae ma th' joostice ta be believin' that a sud evven hev coom'd here hadn't ya sent for ma. A cudn't hev kipt away—A cudn't hev offered. I's fairly coot* ta bits. A canna bethink ma ov puir Miss Undine an' hod† messel' frae greetin'‡—I's evven coot ta ribbins."

And then the tears with much convenient consideration waited on his words.

* Cut.

† Hold.

‡ Crying.

Gideon Cuyp had been busied getting up the best bits of this little speech ; that is, the bits that were the nearest being altogether false, as he came along ; and even up to the right inflection of tone it would be hard to say that there was anything missing. And when he had said this, he sat on and looked only fit to cry.

Lady D'Aeth, with her own agony pressing her down, had yet a place in her sympathies for the great grief of that man in black. What mother would not have yielded up her heart when she saw that her darling's going was such a sore cause of grieving even to this undertaker ? And she came up to the mute figure, and would have pressed the hand that was wagging the kid glove, but that her own strength was utterly gone out of her.

Gideon Cuyp had given much of his skill to soothing ; and he now put away his glove and dipped up to the sorrowing woman. By many a coffin's side, when the time had come for the shutting out of sight of a dear face for ever, Cuyp's firmness was all that

prevented a scene : but then even he had scarcely ever seen a sorrow such as was this. It did not escape the undertaker that the handkerchief Lady D'Aeth was holding to her eyes was by that torrent wetted through ; and as he always was careful to carry about with him a good deal of clean cambric, he very humbly offered the loan of some.

"Nae, nae, bet don't tak' on sooa ; tak' coomfort, tak' coomfort. She's geean'd aisy ; she's wi' th' angels oop yander. She is, ma lady, I's sure on't."

Gideon Cuypp seldom went into such things as the whereabouts of angels. He could remember to have been embraced by those who had been so affectingly reminded by him that their little ones were angels ; and although this mother cried aloud when she heard it, it was a cry of gladness when the thought came of what a company her child was one.

"Yes, yes, she's there, and I must try and not sorrow to give her up." And she did try even then, squeezing the hard hand of the man of that dark trade. "I know

how my good, kind friends everywhere feel for me, Mr. Cuyp. They all loved *her*. They would none of them have harmed my poor, dead darling."

If Gideon Cuyp started at all at this, that he had done so was unobserved; and Lady D'Aeth, gathering strength for what was to come, went on—

"I had something I wished very particularly to say to you, but I think perhaps it can be better said up there. Will you follow me, Mr. Cuyp?"

And he got himself together and followed her.

"A hev'n't gittan ma measure," thought Cuyp to himself as he mounted the stairs, for he began to think that this was looking like business. "A didn't bethink ma a wes ta be gettin' this job; bet happen feeve foot seex* weel meeak' her coomfortable."

If the undertaker of Black Moss was not constantly so situated that he might find himself easily moved by surprises, the more chiefly surprises that came of such scenes,

* Six.

yet he was not able to bear up against that which he then was bidden to look upon.

The bright spring sun was shut out, there was only, near to the corpse, a dim light burning ; and the awful shadows so cast by the drapery of the curtains seemed like many and great spectres standing round about the dead. On the bed, in the chaste white vesture, and in the tiara of pearls over the marble brow, in all of which she was so soon, at the Queen's High Court, to have kissed the Queen's hand, lay that young, that choice, that blighted loveliness, that even the world of London, which had heard of the new beauty in some fashionable print, was waiting to be called together to see at the first May meeting at S. James's—waiting, whilst she whom they were looking for had passed to the Court of the King of kings.

The smile of the grave had stolen down ; every sign that had settled on that face seemed charged with peace. There had been no struggle on that soul's delivery, or in the going out of that fever's fire ; no un-

rest when the end was coming on. It was that soft presentment of the last sleep, that looks so like to the form of the gentlest slumbering. It was as though comfortable words were being whispered by those harp bearers on the crystal floor above—far above the balmy air even of that spring's awakening. It was as if the rest of that, which had leaped into its eternal lines and shapes, was lighting up, with a pale and a holy calm, that which was only this exquisite form of clay. There lay that rare, that pretty flower, scarcely blown, when plucked like this away. Her short spring here had gone by. But those who had known her here could reverently, and with "sure and certain hope," let themselves believe that she had passed into summer time—out of these frosts into enduring dews—into a summer time something the brighter, it might be, even to the angels, for this one other added flower to the horticulture of heaven.

"This—this canna be deeath; it's nit ov this sort ov shaap'!"* said Cuy, fearfully, as

* Shape.

he turned him about, scared by that which he had seen. "Oh, ma lady, tooch her, tooch her! waak'* her! Happen a lile bloode lettin' 'll saav her!"

And as he spoke he sought for his lancet, that lancet which he was generally bidden to use before he began the work of screwing down. But now he cowered there, bewildered—he knew not what he did; for even in all of his experience there was nothing that reminded him of this which was before him.

"It is nothing else but death—it is nothing, nothing else! Touch her hand, but do not cut her with that cruel thing!"

What a world of agony there was in those words!

And Gideon Cuyp, putting away the bit of steel, neared the bed to do as he was told.

He did touch the hands that lay crossed upon that breast; and he drooped his head, and bowed himself as if in recognition of the awful presence, when he felt that chill, which is above every chill.

* Wake.

Now it must be said that Gideon Cuyp did, on the whole, really make a very decent and effective mourner. He had, indeed, so succeeded, that he had caused it to be forgotten he was an undertaker. He who had seen so much of these things, had he not mistaken death for life? At any rate, that poor woman there was well persuaded he was an excellent and soft-hearted creature. And so she took him by the hand, for he was dipping about and across the room as though he were beside himself.

“I know what you would say to me, Mr. Cuyp, but that you think I cannot bear to hear it. You believe I do not dare to think that she—this pretty thing—is within five days of—of being shut out of my sight for ever. That all this form which hangs above and around her here is a horrid mockery; that my sweet one is dust, and that to dust and worse——”

It was all she could say, that wretched, childless woman, and she covered her face with her hands and groaned; for the greatness of her exceeding desolation

was fast getting to be more than she could bear.

Gideon Cuyp, however, began to show that he was coming to; for seeing from behind his pocket-handkerchief that the ground had become professional, he straight-way stepped on to it; and the grief-struck image, in its conventional trade sables, held up its head, and so made answer—

“That, ma lady, varra mooch depeds upod* th’ quality ov th’ lead. A can olas kip oot th’ air, an’ then they lasts for ivver an’ ivver! They dae sooa!”

“No, Mr. Cuyp, you are wrong; it is not that I mean. Minna posted a letter for me last evening” (Cuyp bowed); “that letter was to a firm of undertakers at the West-end of London, who have” (and here she drew nearer to the country furnisher), “who have discovered the wonderful secret of—of *preserving the dead!*” And she said the last words, that to her meant so much, in a whisper. “It was due to you, Mr. Cuyp, to let you know at once how it is that on

* Depends upon.

this occasion I could not avail myself of your services."

Gideon Cuyp hereupon went on bowing ; he began to bethink himself that he was wasting a deal of time.

" But you do not seem to be surprised at what I say about this powder ? I thought the wonderful invention of Messrs. Hattban and Hurse would not have been known in these parts."

The undertaker of Black Moss, and the head of several flourishing agencies, at this drew himself up with a jerk to his full height ; every cubit had a chance, and even such of his inches as were crooked looked straighter ; he played with the black glove that had never yet been fitted on, and having found an opening, was not minded to resign the advantage of fitting into it. There was nothing in his line that he did not know ; and to break away from him was to set others over his head, and was also to say to him that he was only moderate. And moderate, Gideon Cuyp was not. He was not going to be sat upon by Hattban and

Hurse ; but he was not going to show that he cared at all where they sat ; therefore did he stand upon his dignity rather with his feet than with his words.

“ Then a tak’ it, ma lady, ye canna knaa that this pooder is nooa meear theirs than ma ain. A isn’t varra sure bet that this girt idea belongs ta messel’ ; I—”

“ Stop, Mr. Cuyp ; do I then understand you to say that you have ever used this powder ?”

Gideon Cuyp smiled, and worked up a little nearer, that is, a little nearer to Lady D’Aeth ; he was already a great deal nearer to his end. Cuyp smiled, because he wanted to let it seem that, even under such a doubt as this, about his being quite first-class, he could be serene.

“ Awe as a dae, ma lady, in this line is serious girt. I dae nit stay joost only here nor there ; bet a kips stirrin’ aboot, oop an’ doon ; for if at this spot there be happen teem upod teem a site er raain th’ mortality isn’t sooa lofty ; an’ a buries away a terble deal er fooak in pooder.”

“Then I begin to fear I have written to Hattban and Hurse to do that which you could have done quite as well yourself, Mr. Cuyp?”

Cuyp bowed very low. It was true that he was mixed up with others, according to the way in which Lady D'Aeth put it; other than this, however, he was going clean to what he wanted.

“But then, cannot I recall the order? I would, indeed, so much rather that you, Mr. Cuyp—”

Hereupon Cuyp, seeing that Lady D'Aeth hesitated to say more, intervened. It was not, nevertheless, the man's delicacy, although it looked to be so decently intended. But, such as it was, it put her for whom it was meant at instant ease.

“I knaa Hattban an' Hurse sooa weel that a can, if it be agraable, ma lady, telt them it is evven yer weesh that—”

“That everything, Mr. Cuyp, should be left in your hands. It has taken such a weight away from me to be able to feel that I shall not have to call in strangers. My

only fear is, that I shall, perhaps, never be able to repay you, I shall owe to you so very much."

Yes, it would be a good deal that she would presently owe. But Gideon Cuyp did not, however, look literally at this fear which had slipped from a full heart, or he would have backed out of the business before he left the room.

"It is not the cost; no, it is not that. I do not care how much it costs" (Gideon Cuyp made a mental note of this rash avowal), "but there are obligations—and this is one of them—that can carry with them no sufficient money value."

Gideon Cuyp made within his own mind another note to investigate this phenomenon at his earliest leisure; and after having done this, the undertaker showed that he was about withdrawing.

"One moment more, if you please, Mr. Cuyp," said Lady D'Aeth, as they were passing out of the room. "Our Minna was always very dear to my poor dead darling; very dear, indeed. And I want you to let

me have her; to let her live with me; to be to me even all, perhaps, that Undine was, and might have been. I am alone in the world now, Mr. Cuyp, and it is not good to be alone; I could not dare it. I know that it would kill me only to try. And when I die, recollect that Minna will have all that may be mine to leave her."

Gideon Cuyp did not care to hear more, but he did not seem to close at once. He looked to be a great way off closing, though everything was now going so smoothly; he would presently be floating in a golden stream, if his life was only long enough. There is always something that makes the fashion and the form, even of the smoothest things, a little rough: and that which was rough to Gideon Cuyp was the fear that he might, at any time, die before that he had done all he had set himself to do.

"Nae, nae, it's nit th' brass, it isn't, haw-ivver;" put in Cuyp, the while lifting up some of his fingers to meet the stretched-out hand of Lady D'Aeth.

"And I believe, Mr. Cuyp, that I can

give to Minna, position ; she shall go before the Queen next year. And if a husband—”

“ I ex yer pardon, ma lady, boot that’s joost what I wes a coomin’ ta ; I wes that. I haven’t ni brass putten by. I’ve nowt ta gie th’ lass messel’. If she be gettin’ a hoosband, a only ex ta be telt o’ it when it cooms ta th’ papers aboot th’ mooney part er ‘th’ job, for th’ saak er th’ lass herssel’.”

“ It is very well known hereabouts, Mr. Cuyp, that you are a great deal too liberal to every one to have saved anything.”

Now what could Cuyp do when so reminded of his deficiencies in putting away ? He did all that it became him to do—that is, he bowed himself before the speaker gracefully.

“ It has not escaped observation,” continued Lady D’Aeth, “ that you must continually have been losing sight of your own interests. It has not been thrown away on any of us, the great good that you have done.”

Gideon Cuyp could not answer at all to

these things, and he did not even set about attempting so to do. But it was, nevertheless, much more than he could compass, that those who had been so near to him should have seen such a very little. Therefore he, on the whole, thought it best that he should say nothing, lest by some inadvertence the whole fraud should be breaking down; and getting himself under subjection, he would keep only to the business of the disposal of Minna Norman at the best price.

“Minna sall knaa it, ma lady, joost noo; she’s a varra neece sort er a wench—she is that—varra handy, an’ caps owt at pinkin’; an’ she’ll be a bit er a loss ta ma,” said Gideon Cuyp, who, by this, meant that it should be seen that he ought to have some very considerable consideration for giving her up. And then he dipped him down for his hat, and went his way, just as there was some seeming that his feelings were again getting to be over strong for him.

“He is a good, soft, susceptible creature, that’s what he is,” said Lady D’Aeth, after that he had gone out at the door. And she

never felt to be surer of anything than she was of this.

But Gideon Cuyp, who could hang about at doors when he thought it needful to hang about them, had heard these words ; and as he limped down the stairs, the hereafter that there should be to himself, in this shadowed-forth future of Minna's, whirled backwards and forwards in his brain.

"It's better than owt that's ivver coom'd ta me afoore—it is sooa."

And as the little man took his way through the trees, and put up in their bit of paper his trade-gloves, he stopped to get his breath and think.

"Nae," he chuckled to himself, as he was once more shuffling at a great speed ; "nae, saft, an' soosceptible, ye happen, isn't ; bet, Gideon Cuyp, ye is a girt creatur'."

CHAPTER V.

GUY MELCHIOR.

As Gideon Cuyp was at that great speed getting over the ground, he nearly, at one corner, chanced to overset Guy Melchior, the vicar of Black Moss, who, too, was on his way to offer sympathy at the house of mourning.

The undertaker, however, brought himself up in time; and when he could fetch his breath, and had offered some excuses for the manner of his going, it was at once seen the pleasant mood that he was in.

"I'se glad that ye manages ta kip yer heealth soa weel, Mr. Melchior," said Gideon Cuyp, with a kindliness in his way of putting it, and a warmth in his tone, that he could be, at some seasons, very great at assuming. He had got rid of a good many in that

place, but though the scourge grew worse, the vicar still went his way untouched in the midst of it. Cuyp was set on having the life of this priest; therefore, as he meant to take it darkly, it was a part of the game that he was playing to say to the man how glad he was that he was taking no harm.

“Let a-le-an* yer coomfortable consolations which awe th’ puir seek fooaks here-aboots moost be wantin’ noo, pretty mooch at yan teem, there’s th’ funerals which ha’ bin gettin’ terble rank a laate. If there isn’t anudther agin at three ta-day, aald le-am† Luke’s geeand. his waays at last; it seemed once o’er likely enoo that he’d be stoppin’ for ivver, it did that; an’ a gae hankle‡ he’s left hissels in, he’ll be forced ta be burried a sittin’, for a canna get him straighted oop; an’ then there’s a lile, tinny bairn at a bit past foor. It’s varra sad, Mr. Melchior, sooch a serious sight ov deeaths—varra sad—it is sooa.”

“And what’s worse, Mr. Cuyp, it is

* Alone.

† Lame.

‡ Mess.

spreading, and unaccountably spreading. It has not taken hold as does this sort of fever ordinarily. There seems to be that about it which even the drain can scarcely cause. The way the infection is carried from house to house is not the general way of this visitation. I have seen something of these malignant fevers before now, yet I never did see anything work about, passing over some, and seizing others, as this one does. It has, for instance, not reached *your* house, Mr. Cuyp, but you are, nevertheless, surrounded by those who are sick with it, and neither have you nor Miss Norman had it before. It is a fearful and mysterious scourge."

"Bet happen awe for oor goode that these sad sets coom on es, eh! Mr. Melchior?" meekly and mildly, and altogether in his best manner, suggested Mr. Cuyp.

"God only knows. God only knows. Good morning."

And the vicar of Black Moss went his way.

"Nae, I'se thinkin' varra sendry.* I doesn't believe that any sort ov body knaas

* Different.

owt aboot it. It isn't likely. It's as weel, hawivver, that th' parson should be scoorin'* it agin th' Lord."

And Cuyp turned him about, following the vicar with his eyes, till he was lost amongst the trees. .

"I'se woondering when it's to be his toorn." And when he had so wondered, he set off again at a high speed for his home.

Guy Melchior was the only son, and the only surviving child of one Arthur Melchior. His mother had died when he was very young; but, through all those days that had since gone by, a memory often came back to him of a sad and a gentle face; sad, that is, when it had not been bending over him, and then it had seemed to have borne nothing about it but that sacred, searching gentleness which, saved from the wreck of Paradise, to float as it does float, in protecting freshness over the pollutions that cross and that surround us, must be the belonging of a mother. That smile had

* Scoring.

never ceased to follow him, in memory, ever since that afternoon when it had gone from her lips for ever.

Marion Melchior inherited a withering disease that killed her before she was twenty-five. And it seemed to Guy that he had missed a little bright thing from his side, it might be, about the same time, that must have been a sister. And in all this did Guy remember rightly what had been.

After the death of his wife, Arthur Melchior came to find out—what many another one so desolated has also found—that there was now to him, and that there would be to him so long as he lived, nothing but uttermost darkness, where before there had only been light. And he who has lost this light from his life's path, if it were such as his heart loved, is he not for ever afterwards coldly careless about all else which may afflict him? He who is so alone does not ask to tarry in that loneliness, for has he not already passed out of life into existence?

And after that Arthur Melchior had been parted from his wife, he wholly ceased to

care about what he should do. He even did such things as were not quite convenient. He sacrificed his share in a considerable business when he could not well be spared. It is true that he had always been—ever since the day that he came into the concern—the working partner, the convenience without capital; and when he went out, merely because he was troubled about the blank that there was in his home, it followed that his share should be represented only in good wishes and good words. And of these he had the best, and was thankful. Upon them, and upon an incoming that was very small, and that might get to be less, did Arthur Melchior go with his little son—the little son who was so like to *her*—to finish his days on the banks of Windermere.

By the “river lake” Guy grew apace out of the child.

And as he went on growing, it was soon seen that as he had been bent, so would he be. He was early set upon manly things; and he knew, as well as those who had been

born there, every mountain, every tarn, every stream, and every cairn on the tops of the mountains. He stuck his little stick into Helvellyn "man" before he was well ten; and no one had a better knowledge of the mountain passes than had he. As time went on with him, his manliness, his personal strength, and his unparaded kindliness, attracted the notice of that king of men, John Wilson, who even in those later days lived at times at Elleray. Together they swam the lake from shore to shore, where, too, those shores are better than a mile asunder. Together they hunted bulls at midnight, calling out De Quincey at cock-crowing to give them to eat. Guy, at fifteen years, was fast growing into a man; into a man, too, with only generous and noble impulses; and these were qualities that were at no time lost upon Christopher North.

"What do you mean to be, Melchior, when you are a man?" asked the Professor of Guy, one morning after they had been reading Greek play together.

"I should like, I think, to be a clergy-

man," answered Guy, rather as though he had set his affections upon that which could not be.

"And why not? It is a good thing to be if the work is done heartily."

And whilst he answered this he was busied taking some account of that which was a power in his pupil's arm.

"Your heart, Melchior," he went on to say, "is always in that which you are set upon doing; you can fight, and will not early cry, enough; you threw little Tommy Longmire* clean two out of three, this morning; you can do all such things as it is well for a man to do. Your young life has been pure. It is of such stuff that the Church is asking for her labourers to be; with hearts to fight the hardest fight, and always wanting to be set on against odds; to back-heel the devil, Melchior, as you back-heelled little Tommy Longmire the last fall, just when he was minded he would 'hipe' you badly. But he didn't, because, quick

* Longmire, who then was a mere boy, has since become champion wrestler of England.

as he is, you were before him. Now the Church has not too many who are fit to wrestle for her, though many of them strip and get into the ring, and get hold, and lie down. These are the wrestlers, Melchior, that the Church is too well found in. It should show you what she is, that she takes no harm by their miserable and guilty fears. I do not think that yours would be an allegiance such as is theirs. If you have purposed to be one of the few that will not lose a fall, do not, my boy, be lightly otherwise persuaded."

"I'd like to be able to try, Mr. Wilson ; I'd do everything I knew to put him down," said the boy, bravely, as he looked straight into the face of that grand old man. And when he so spoke of the great wrestle that he burned to have, he meant that he and the evil one should come together for a bout,—“If he'll only take a fair hold——”

“But he won't, Melchior ; he never does.”

“Then he ought to be barred out of every ring.”

Wilson smiled, for he could not help it, at the very literal lad before him; and Guy went on.

"But I'm afraid I shall have to be something else though," he said, mournfully; "sit on a stool, with a salary on a rising scale after a bit, and with nothing at first. My father's too poor, ever so much too poor, to send me to college. I know he is, for he has told me so."

"And if he is, my boy; and if he is?" said Wilson, warmly, "you shall go to Oxford, if you care to go, for all that your father is poor."

"Yes, I'd care very much to go, Mr. Wilson."

"Then, Melchior, I'll show you how to earn your way there; for if you are what I take you to be, you'll be *earning* your way to most places and things that you will want to reach to or to have."

And whatever John Wilson ever set his mind on he never went from. He had a terrible strength of heart and arm.

"Why, *I've* known what it was to be poor;

although my sweet dead darling Jane *did* keep most of that which was hard or grim out of the sight of *my* eyes."

And he turned away from speaking about her to rally himself under *that* tree which was called "Jane's Tree"—she had been some time gone from him, too, yet was there no sign of healing where he had been torn at that parting. When he had presently mastered the memories which came crowding back, he said—

"Look here, Melchior, this is how you shall go there; you and I will read together every day; for if I am to have anything to do with this business, it shall be a first-class or a ploughing. Say nothing to your father about it at present. There shall be no counting-house for you if you don't want it. As sure as I'm Kit North, and Billy Balmer's my coxswain, we'll kick over this stool that they are setting up for you."

And that which they had there agreed to do they did; but years the while had gone on. Wilson, who had put down Guy's name at University College, was fast passing into an

old man—a breaking heart had made him to stoop, and he lived now chiefly at his home in Edinburgh. There, however, Guy went to him until the time for his going up to Oxford drew very near.

“Now then, you may tell your father Melchior what we have been hatching, and say to him from me that there’s going to be a first-class at the end of it. And don’t forget to let *me* know, if there seems to be any hitch about the money; and I’ll see to the getting rid of it.”

He would always lend his hand to the getting rid of anything that bore hardly upon any one who was right minded. He purposed to be this young man’s friend in that business; and he who leaned on John Wilson was never cast away.

The next morning Guy was early on his way to his home amongst the hills; and the day after he was once more under his father’s roof.

“I don’t know how it is, but I have not been seeing much of you lately, Guy,” said Arthur Melchior as they sat together at

breakfast; "and now that I have got you here again, the sight of you does me good, my boy. You must be stopping here a while."

And so did the father plead to have a little of the company of his only son, that there was a manly tear at the back of his words. Then he was ill at ease over his toast, and threw about his tea; for he was coming to the great matter of what this only son of his should do; and he did not well know how to begin.

"Now—now, just tell me frankly, Guy—never mind whether I shall like to hear what you may have to say or no—but tell me, for it is time to talk of this thing—what—what would you like to be?"

This was not at all asked, as these questions mostly are asked of the young, when it is intended to find an answer for them—to get their confidence, and then betray it; to lead them on to say what they would like to be, and then to say that it has all been some time chosen for them. What to do with lads who are too big for

school, and are not meant for college, is nearly always determined by straightway putting them to do that for which they have neither sympathy nor fitness. No questions are asked them if they are only early and late to be found upon their stools. Whilst they from those heights of steadiness, those pinnacles in the which "business habits" are only to be found, may be merely longing for something a little more congenial, they are receiving the congratulations of their friends upon their prospects, if they don't turn back from their soulless slavery. Turn back! why the boy is mourned over, who would the rather be great than middling; who would the rather be working his own way, at a pure ambition, than be learning the tricks of a well-to-do cipher. For sordid dulness, there is, be it known, for the youth of this nation an immense field. The grasping boy may always be freely accommodated. Indeed, the field is only bounded by space; and some investigators there are who believe that beyond this world it has established branches. The

boy is judged for—the boy, who, as a great writer has well put it, “is set down as dull, because perhaps he is pensive;” and who is a little later a man with a business, that must either repudiate all principles, or give up all its projects—and the giving up after this sort is not a common thing to do; or it may be with a trade, the working of which he can only despise. Was he not taught his duty to his neighbour in the evenings of those now far-off Sundays before he went to bed, just after he could talk? And here he will not love his neighbour as himself. His whole life will be set out, if he means to be great in city circles—in the taking in of all men. But the boy who may see all this before him, dares not, very often, turn away, unless he would turn him from his home, certainly from home regards. That which the father has filled, the son must follow. It cannot be that the heir shall be above his inheritance, even of “business habits,” the which are not always clean. Now are there many bitternesses and many agonies; but, when it is thought how, almost without exception,

the great matter of choosing for the young—for the young, too, of all temperaments, is carried out amongst us, who is there to say, that where these bitternesses and agonies—the harder by a great deal perhaps because they must be borne, or battled with silently—are many, they might not and should not be few? And you, at whose bidding this is done; you fathers, who have set upon those ones of your own begetting this burden, can you answer at all to these things?

Now Arthur Melchior from the first day that he had a son, had well thought over this—thought over it with all his heart helping him to do such as was right to his boy. He felt, as it was meant a father should feel, about this great matter of putting his son out into the world. He wanted Guy to come to him and to keep nothing back; to say all, to leave nothing behind unsaid. This father was fearing lest his son should commit himself to that which went against him, so that the relation between them might continue to be smooth. He did not seek for anything smooth at such a price.

Arthur Melchior, indeed, was dreading, with a great and a feverish dread, that any wish of his might, with a fixed and a serious purpose, be taken up and in the heart of Guy come to mean a law. So he was minded, as far as in him lay, when this business should be spoken about between them, as spoken about it must be, to say nothing; to hear his son on to the end—however impossible it might be to follow; therefore did he seem scarcely surprised at the answer that he got from Guy.

“I have a good deal to say to you, father, about what I would like to be, and I would want to tell you everything; there had better be no concealment between us, even of our thoughts. So let’s wait till after breakfast, and we’ll go and see some of the old places, and talk this matter over there.”

Arthur Melchior had tried very hard, ever since that son was born to him, to be a good father. This is a broad thing to be, and may need, even in these days, to be defined. Now he, in his time, had seen so many sons—boys not utterly bad from the be-

ginning—foundering outside all communion with their fathers. He had known those who had been overwhelmed with the sacrifice of bribing a constable or a watchman, before they would tell to their father that they had in a weak moment fallen. Nor could Arthur Melchior, from all which had entered into his experience, persuade himself that the cause of all this should always be carried to the credit of the child; for he remembered to have known it otherwise. He had, indeed, seen the parent to knock, and go on knocking; and he had also seen where the child nevertheless had opened up nothing. And after the father had been so kept out, Arthur Melchior could also remember to have seen the butler, or the groom, taken into confidence when the father's terrible knocking had not brought out anything. And yet it had not seemed that the heart of the boy was wrong, or that it was beating heavily with a load of guilt. He was not yet poisoned by the poisons near and about him. The right stuff was in him in some plenty; he was pure. But there was this at the back of all the reserve;

he did not know when he might be taking any harm to himself by speaking out. He shrank from the big man's scorn, and winced before his sneer. He had been ridiculed once for some child's confession he had made; and he would rather be buffeted than bear that again. After that day the boy had locked himself up, and it was a hopeless thing to do to knock, for he would not be opened. Still Arthur Melchior felt that he could have plumbed all that boy's perplexities in a moment; and yet it was not open to doubt that the father on the whole meant well. It was only that he had, by his own act, lost the way to the heart of the child of his own loins. That was all.

It was a lovely morning in early May when Arthur Melchior and his son went out with this excellent understanding, to say one to the other such things about the future as they felt it was in their hearts to say. They had crossed the head of Windermere, and had taken the road that would lead them to Troutbeck Bridge. They had only spoken yet of the scene that was around

them, for years had gone by since they had walked thus together. They were passing the Dove's Nest, with one of the grandest reaches of the "Queen of Lakes" stretching out before them, when the elder of the two settled down to the work that he had come out to do.

"And so you have a great deal to tell to me? Nothing I know but what it is well for me to hear. What is it now, Guy?"

"Yes, I have a great deal to say; but I'm almost afraid you won't like to hear it all. There is nothing though, beyond this, which I am going to speak about now, that I have done, that you don't know. It is the only thought of my heart you have not been told of, almost as soon as it came into it. And it has cost me something to keep *this* back."

So spoke the boy-man, with that big frame and that terrible arm—with that hug in the wrestling ring. He looked as though he could have very well shifted for himself wherever he might be; that he could fight

his own battles and not take any harm. But Guy Melchior had always found that a father's sympathy was a ready help in the roughest places. He had never asked of that father bread and been served to a stone. He had never come to him in his troubles and been flung away. And as had been the sowing, so would be the reaping.

"Out with it all, Guy. I dare say it isn't very bad; it is not very likely if John Wilson has been your adviser. Try to be sure of this. I only want you to be whatever you would like best; it shall somehow be afforded. I have put by enough, I think, to give you this start."

Now it is protested here that Guy Melchior was not after any sort "better disposed" than are a great many others of his age. He was not a castaway, nor was he a hero. You, parents, who stand, as you may be seen to stand, amazed, outside your son's confidence, and, as you cannot hide from yourself, almost outside his love, don't catch at this idea, for it wont avail you: and even if Guy Melchior be not the wrong-

doer that your boy is, don't you believe that you can so be rid of your obligations, simply because you hear from the city that your belonging, on that stool, is getting to be a thief; because you know he has long been an adulterer; because he is very nearly a cheat; and because Guy Melchior has not given up himself to any of these things. Is your conscience at all clear of offence when you see society turning itself away from your son as though he were infectious, for has he not been found out? Some of the issues, it may be, shall rest on his own soul; but shall not also some of his excuses lie heavy upon yours?

"What I should like *best*, then, father, is to be a clergyman."

"Then a clergyman you shall be, Guy. How it would have pleased *her*, this choice of yours, if she had lived!"

Only in the flesh were those two parted. For in memory was not the dead one always walking by his side?

"You asked me to say to you what I would rather be; but for all that you have


said in answer, I am here to tell you now I will be anything you wish, and, at any rate, will try to like it."

"No, Guy, no. God helping me, you shall never be so tried. In my time I have been obliged to see some of these sacrifices, much of this torture, many of these mistakes. I won't add another, if I know it, to the heap. Why should I be standing in your way—for have you not chosen much better than well?"

And then Guy told him all; how that with Wilson he had worked early and late; how, too, his name had been entered at Oxford, and how truly his heart was set on becoming a clergyman. In all that he said there was no reserve; nothing, the telling of which he put off to a more convenient season—for the season had come to speak out concerning everything. There was nothing to conceal between those two. They would not have known how they should set about the contriving of any concealment between one another. Theirs was a communion that it is very good to see. The father

at fifty, and the son at eighteen, could look one another in the face. So had they always lived together—almost from Guy's first coming until now.

“This is just what I was wanting to find out; and as I have found it, I don't mind telling you, Guy, that I had other views for you. I know what you are making ready to say, that you will fall in with them; but you wont. I am very glad you have upset them. Your Uncle Michael had offered me to take you into his house—and his is a very great house—with the possibility of your being perhaps other than a clerk some day. He is very rich, and we, Guy, are not so very well to do; but he says, and he never goes from such sayings, that to do this is all that he can ever do for you. I do not tell you but that this start would have been something; still I was not without hope that you would have determined in this matter exactly as you have chosen. And having this hope—seeing, too, how much you and Wilson have been together—I have put away enough, it may be, to allow to you two



hundred a year, so long as you remain at Oxford. Now, two hundred pounds a year, Guy, would not be nearly enough for most ; but I believe that with you it will be sufficient. Men are not judged by their means at Oxford. Those who consort only with the holders of long purses have their set, but it is a small one. It will be your best privilege that they will pass you by. No thanks, my boy—no thanks. It is I who thank God that I have such a son.”

And then they walked back to their home, that glorious noon time, by the still lake’s side. When they were there and had sat down, after that they had dined, Arthur Melchior began to speak about the future again.

“It will be a hard struggle, Guy ; you have not forgotten how hard it will be, but then it was so intended. The cure of souls was never meant to be a sinecure ; a thing to be followed as lightly and indifferently as it often is. I have no interest to get you anything. Your uncle cannot help you if he would—you have no one here but your

poor father to come to—only these nearly weary arms. You must not look beyond a curacy—a hundred pounds a year—many privations, much self-denial; having to fast, perhaps, on days other than those set apart by the Church for the abstaining from all meats. But then, mayhap, it is nearer to heaven than is the highest stool—eh, Guy? I do not tell you of these things that must come upon you because I wish that you should be cast down. If you cannot face the thought it were better that you went into your uncle's great concern whilst yet there is time."

Guy looked up and squeezed his father's hand.

"I will try hard that I may never be cast down."

For he was fearful whether his strength would stand—fearful because he knew his weakness. And then Arthur Melchior went on.

"You mustn't have any great hope of preferment if so be that you do not waver. I think that I can even now see some of the

early signs of that rationalism which is coming upon the Church of this land. The Puritan clergy without learning, and with much assurance, are at this present filling the country; but there are not wanting symptoms that another form of faithlessness will, after awhile, be even better received, and better preferred. I have lately had that put into my hands which shows me I do not mistake the signs of those things which are surely coming on us. There are at this moment in circulation these two evidences of the truth of what I say—thrown out as feelers—these two titles have been privately sent forth in the University of Cambridge—‘Is the Story of Creation to be taken literally?’ and this is followed by ‘the Discrepancies of Deuteronomy.’ Already is the prayer-book repudiated; now we are so getting on that we shall have the Bible dishonoured. If you join these men, Guy, you may presently rise very high. Do you bethink you you can resist all the subtle temptations of such elevation? Do not answer to this now, but think: think,

too, when you will come to see these men, with their sensuous imagery of style and surface learning, thrust into every see. That you will have to meet some of it at Oxford, I believe. It is nearly ready to break out in more than one of our public schools. Has it not already got its patrons in the highest places? But they will shake no man suddenly. It will yet be craftily recommended before that it is openly avowed. It will, however, come upon us after many years, for are there not already the signs of its coming?—even as a recognised blasphemy will it be upon us, with its own bishops, and other smaller helpers. Now this trial to the Church is only smouldering, but it will take hold, Guy; and when it does there will be many stumblers, and in those days may God confirm and strengthen you, my boy.”

Later in that afternoon Guy Melchior sat down to write to Wilson and tell him all that had been spoken in the morning.

Wilson’s answer was this :—

“MY DEAR GUY,

“You must go on as you have begun, and this is how you shall go. You must get a scholarship; there is, I find, an open one at University in six weeks. It will not, mind, be anything like to a walk over. Many good men will, it is probable, be against you; so that you will be able to beat something that is worth a beating, for this scholarship *must* be yours. It cannot be allowed that your good father should have to touch that which he has put by. As to the rest, you can earn a hundred a year by writing—I will show you the way. You had better come on here at once if you mean to get this scholarship, and if you do not mean you will have done with,

“Yours affectionately,

“JOHN WILSON.”

The next morning Guy left for Edinburgh, once more to read with Wilson.

In the end he prevailed over all that came against him, and he got the scholarship easily.

After that he had been a little while at Oxford, he set himself to do that other thing—to write for some of the bread which he would have to eat. At this he did not so well succeed. His first MS. was declined, sent back on to his hands. Then he went at it again, and although this was likely to have followed the other, he did not know how nearly he had failed a second time; for Wilson it was who found the many pounds that paid for it, and who had it published on his own account. But then the charities of John Wilson were not meant of all men to be seen.

The career of Guy Melchior at Oxford was a very brilliant one indeed—brilliant in the schools and out of them—it was made to be felt throughout the University, and also out of it, even on the bodies of bargees, and such others as might, in the flesh, set themselves against him. Then, too, as Wilson all along had said, there was a first class in classics at the end of it. As his father had told him it would be, so did he find that it was—for never was he

reminded that he was only a poor gentleman.

From the University he presently passed into a curacy. He might, indeed, have been made travelling tutor to a lord, but he decided to let the honour alone. He saw where the assault was to be made in the Church's lines, for even then were there the signs of that which was coming; and weak as he felt himself to be, he was minded to be up and in the front to meet it.

Therefore, when the offer of the vicarage of Black Moss was made to him, he did not stand hesitating whether he should accept it, as some others would have stood, for the incoming to the Vicar of Black Moss, be it known, was almost contemptible. It was because of the kind offices of a hidden friend that he got this gift, such as it was, and he never could persuade himself but that this hidden friend was Wilson.

Now Black Moss, ecclesiastically, was not a stepping stone. It led to nothing. It had not been always possible to find a man to fill it. No one could recollect that it

had ever supplied an archdeacon, or a dean, or a bishop. It was to commit ecclesiastical suicide to come there. Clergymen, with whatever zeal — with families — remembered this, if the living were laid at their feet. And their wives would have none of it, not only because it was not a living at all, but because “there must come up damp out of that horrible tarn.” So, after this, there was nothing more to be said.

The house, too, such as it was, lay very low, close to the churchyard, almost, indeed, amongst the tombs; and it was truly told that when the waters were out, after a heavy flood, it was sometimes surrounded. But then none of these things came into the mind of Guy Melchior when he heard that he might pass into a vicar. If he measured his means with others about him he would be “passing rich,” for some of them had so to pass upon less; and he settled down a little while after that his father had died, feeling no emptiness of purse, for his hopes were young and full, and as yet they had not been rudely upset.

Guy Melchior succeeded an "evangelical minister" in this place, a mild and an amiable Protestant who hated all disputings, and only quietly, and to himself, had "conscientious scruples" about certain of the Articles. These scruples had, however, none of them overtaken him before that day when he said he would have them to be neither more nor less than thirty-nine. After that the bishop had laid his hands upon him did these scruples come.

Guy Melchior found that in following this man he would chiefly have to show that England had any such a belonging as a Church; for during the time of the late vicar this had never been made plain to the dwellers in Black Moss. He found on the noon of that day on which he read himself in, that many of his people were Dissenters, only, it seemed, because they had never been told why they should be church men and women.

On his way to the early dinner at the Abbey he was able to see some of the work that he would have to do. The various

schisms that abounded were abroad—out in the air. There were, in little knots, Methodists and Wesleyans, Baptists, Independents, and—yet a little further higher up—a frantic and a loud “New Light,” burning with a great and an exceeding glare, howling and grimacing horribly on the top of a boatman’s box. Some of these violent missionaries were miners; others were fishers; and the rest were chiefly swillers,* moved to become preachers. One thing, however, amidst these varieties was done in common. The irreverence of all was about equal and awful. Names the most sacred were shouted out by these gesticulators with ribald familiarity, as though they were calling upon one another. Each one was mounted on a box, or a three-legged stool; and though there were gaping listeners gathered round about all, it was nevertheless very clear that the Independent performer—who was the most hoarse as well as the least decent—was for this reason the favourite, because that he would soon have to give the business up, for

* Basket-makers.

he would presently be voiceless. This man, too, in his language dealt in figures. He seized upon such people or things as might be passing to illustrate his text—that text running over all in the two Testaments that he could remember. A woman bearing a jug for beer, had crossed his point of view, therefore did he leave the rich man abruptly in hell, and after this fashion keep himself to the woman with the jug:—

“Ye sees that wooman wi’ th’ joog away yander. Ye happen bethink yerssels likely enoo that she’s a wooman er Black Moss.” (“Ay, ay! sure,” put in one of the congregation, “that’s her es wes wed a bit sen,* it’s evven Sawrey’s dowter.† Bet I’s tellin’ yer, she’s nowt at awe ov kind—she’s for ivver th’ wooman er Semmarry.”

Then he raved on concerning that, as he had raved before, until, in the end, he only appeared to those about him to speak, for he was voiceless.

Now, this man verily and really did so rave, and give up his voice on that box,

* Since.

† Daughter.

after this sort, only last summer. Such things as these cannot be, cannot last, even for a day, when the Church is at its work. Many places in the north of England, at this present, are hideous with dissent. You cannot be sure but that your butcher will leave his meats to seek your "conversion;" and he of whom you may chance to hire a boat is a select preacher, every evening, about the time of the going down of the sun.

On the shores even of Geneva nothing could be colder than on the shores of Black Moss when Guy Melchior went into that valley. Many men coming there as did Guy would have hastened to do all that they meant to do at once; and out of their zeal without discretion, would have come heartburnings, strifes, hatreds, and confusion. But whilst he never gave up any principle, where he could, he let his people stir themselves. In two years the Dissenters had utterly gone out of their midst; the "new light" too was clean put out, nothing remained that had been left by Guy's

mild Protestant predecessor—not a trace of his faithlessness, no, not even his memory. The once leading Dissenters were coming to church. They, some of them, even sank their moneys in the building of church schools. A little later there were daily services; but in the doing of this Guy Melchior's personal influence, blessed as it was, was immense. He seemed to the young to be like an elder brother. He taught them how to resist, and how to struggle with their souls' enemies; and he taught them this not only from the pulpit, but by his life. He taught them, too, how to swim, and on the flat by the tarn how to wrestle, and generally how to take care of their bodies. He knew that with them all he had unlimited influence; and he never had cause to feel that he had only narrow means. Sawrey Knotts, who had been great as a "New Light," was the last to give in. He had been some time a Dissenting preacher, and his free style was dear to the ten "new lights" that followed him. But when he gave up his conceits and his

flock, and became sexton, church-feeling at Black Moss never afterwards got a check.

This was the beginning of the excellency of the life of Guy Melchior as a parish priest. He had one hundred pounds a year, without a money hope beyond, and he was content. As a deacon he could not be reproached with being "given to much wine;" and as a priest he could point to the catastrophe of dissent, a full church, and an empty cellar.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FEVER COAT.

It was about two days later that the mail brought to Gideon Cuypp a letter from Hattban and Hurse. It came too, free, for a penny only; and it was to look at and handle just like to any other letter. He had expected he would receive from the West-end firm something very different in size and weight to this. It might be, however, that this had come to him first to advise him of that which was on its way. Anyhow the getting of it had not put him at his ease; and he turned it restlessly about in his hands, after the manner of many of us, when something comes to us through the post which we do not very well like to face.

“It’s a bit straanage I’s thinkin; bet hap-

pen it's terble leet,* this gae pooder, an' likely a lile geeans a girt way. It canna weel be here. It canna that."

And so saying, to put an end to conjectures that were fast making him uncomfortable, he dashed at the letter and broke the seal.

Gideon Cuyp in all that he had surmised was very wrong: there was no powder; there was no advice of any coming, nothing at all—nothing but that which angered him to get, only a very sufficient trade reason for refusing to supply it.

Now Cuyp after seeing the strait that he was in, was for a little season at his wit's end. Had not Undine now been dead three days, and where was this powder that he had gone and boastfully undertaken to find? He was as far off finding it as he had ever been; nor could he see his way to lay his hands on any. He began to think he had something over-reached himself. Why had he meddled with that seal? It was going to turn out a very profitless felony. So at

* Light.

least, Cuyp bethought him when he was first staggered. When he was afterwards cooler, he no longer repented him of that which he had done.

He kept stopping by the way, to read the words over and over again; but he had rightly read them on the first reading. No one could well have written plainer things than had Hattban and Hurse. Cuyp, for a little, as he limped back to his home, thought that it was all over with him. The end then of this powder would be a gaol. He would be getting shut up. And he plunged along the road as though the officers were already out to seek him.

Now Gideon Cuyp was very far from being quite himself, when he was chased about like that by any such fears. But, was not this the second time that Hattban and Hurse had seemed likely to be standing between him and his gains? The knowing of them had been to him throughout a sore and a grievous trial. He had been a fool, and he was minded, if he was yet left to be at large, that he would mend.

So did the letter run:—

“SIR,

“We beg to acknowledge the receipt of yours of the 2nd instant, ordering some of our powder for a young female, and in reply we have to say that it is a rule of ours never to supply it to the trade. We only use this preparation ourselves.

“We are,

“Your obedient Servants,

“HATTBAN & HURSE.”

Gideon Cuyp, before he got back to his home, had well made up his mind what he would do. And it now seemed to him that he was not nearly at the end of his resources. During the three days last past his fancy had been travelling over a deal of ground—even to some place where there were nothing but groups of the richest mourners coming out to meet him—coming to his feet for a little of his saving powder, on his own terms. And in this picture had they not been getting it in the order in which they

could pay for it the soonest and the best? Was he to say to all or to any of them, I have none of it? Must he pass them on—offering as they were to pay in cash—to Hattban and Hurse? No, he would not pass one of them on. He would accommodate them all. They who had come to him for comfort should lean upon him still. And when he came to think of these things, he could almost see the mourners and feel their money.

It has been said that Gideon Cuyyp was not, after coming to, nearly at the end of his resources. It were better said, indeed, that he was only quite at their beginning. It was not now clear to him why he had been so suddenly cast down.

“Wyah, I’s a gae fool an’ a silly,” he said with some fervour, for he felt he had earned it, and tearing the letter into little pieces. “I’s bin o’er vexed an’ afeard for nowt. They isn’t sa saft as tae let this pooder stoof be gitten inta ma’s hands. Nae, nae, sure it wesn’t serious likely. Maybe thea’s nowt in’t, that it’s only

a ploomp* fraud. I's bin a marpie, that's what I's bin. If a wesn't geean ta pay Hattban an' Hurse forra thing that's gittan nowt in't! I's capped if a wes'n serious daft; a wes, hawivver. An' noo thu'll likely be joost this lile difference, that udther fooak weel be payin' ma for th' seeam sort ov a conseederation. Any pooder, I tak' it, weel dae; one's like enoo ta' nudther. Wyah, if it won't be aweprofit; it's evven a gae goode job—it is sooa."

So did Gideon Cuyp pass out of his fears of a gaol—out of those pangs that had lately taken such hold of him, into a future peopled with mourners pressing on for his powder, and getting—that which he would give them, caring not even to ask for discount, as they carried it away.

By noon that day his work of fraud at the Abbey was fully done.

The Friday that came after this had been fixed on for the funeral of Undine D'Aeth; and when Gideon Cuyp had so finished his work at the Abbey, he went up to do another

* Plump.

at the Vicar's, and he did this, whilst it seemed that he had only come to tell the hour that they would have to be at the grave.

Guy Melchior, it so happened, had just got back to the vicarage when the undertaker reached the door. Guy was glad to see Cuyp, for, like as did all men in those parts, he thought nothing but well of the little furnisher.

"It is very good of you to give yourself all this trouble, Mr. Cuyp—very good. May I offer——" he was going on to ask if he might offer his heated visitor a glass of red wine. He had had a dozen, which survived from his cellar in that Oxford locker, and he was now always forgetting they had been some time gone.

"I was going to have asked you if you would take a little wine after your hard walking, Mr. Cuyp; but I just now remember I am quite out of it."

"Nae, nae, Mr. Melchior, it's varra goode er ye sa ta bethink yerssel; bet a nivver tooches it—nivver; it crappens oop inta ma

neb,* serious—it does sooa. I nivver soops owt bet wattre; a lile wattre at beck when I's dry is awe a ivver soops. I bethink ma there's o'er mooch fire droonk in way er spurrits."

"No doubt, Mr. Cuyp, there is a great deal in what you say. If we all were to drink a little water sometimes, instead of always taking wine or malt, we should very likely be the better for it. But I do not think it would be well to do so now. I cannot think we ought to let our system be getting too low with such a fever about. I believe that the water has a great deal to do with this scourge."

Hereupon Cuyp smiled and edged himself out of the light a little bit. It was the smile that his face always did wear when he was not persuaded to think with other people. It was not his business to differ from that which they might say, more roughly or openly. He was set on the Vicar becoming a drinker of water; but he was not going to show upon what he was set ;

* Head.

therefore did he answer nothing beyond that smile.

"But you are not a water-drinker at *these* times, Mr. Cuyp?"

"Olas,* Mr. Melchior, olas; I soops nowt bet a lile wattre," replied Cuyp, meekly. "Soorfeet th' bloode, an' then there isn't nowt that can saave ye."

He had never given alcohol with doubtful success where he wanted a cure.

"I know that most of our physicians will reduce the system in these cases," said Guy; "but nevertheless I think they are wrong. I believe the day will come when they will even order brandy. Were I seized, so at least would I be treated."

A few years later, and the first physician of his time had come to think with Guy Melchior.

Gideon Cuyp knew sufficiently well when he had pushed a point far enough; and he was now well persuaded that he had better save this one alone. He had not, indeed, one all that he came there to do. But

* Always.

then, had not the vicar said, "If I am seized, I will have brandy." If the vicar did get to be seized, this thing that he had said would not be forgotten by Cuyp. Therefore he refrained himself, and said nothing more about the water diet, and got him up to leave.

"I think you said two o'clock for the funeral, Mr. Cuyp. By the way, I had promised to go over on Friday morning to Red Moss, to see poor Job Redcar, who I fear, from what I hear, is but little likely to get over his sickness this time. He is very sadly. They tell me he has scarcely a coat to his back."

Cuyp let go the handle of the door. He had found an opening now, and turning him about, showing nothing of that which stirred him, he went into it.

"Ay, ay; sa I've bin telt by a goode few; he's for ivver full er dreenk, an' teem upod teem is fairly mad. Puir Job, puir Job! Weel, bet he wes a fine lad when a first knaad him a while sen'; there wes nin that'd offer ta say wrong ta him; an' ta bethink ma that

he's coomd ta this. It's a sad set that fooaks meeak' er thesels when they's for ivver beered oop."

And after he had spoken this, he came a little nearer to the vicar, and then said, with just enough hesitation fitly to introduce the Samaritan appeal that was to follow—

"About that co-at, Mr. Melchior; it canna be that Job's ta be starved for a co-at; nowt at awe er kind. Yerd happen think that a wes exing o'er mooch, if a exed ye ta tak' a new warrm* co-at ta puir Job. I cud send it roond ta ye varra weel ta neet."

"I shall be only too glad to carry the coat. We are all of us bidden to clothe the naked; and they do say that Job cannot go abroad for his nakedness. Bring it when you please, Mr. Cuyp."

And after this the undertaker went his way.

Gideon Cuyp had been very badly down when he got that letter from Hattban and Hurse; but now he was up. He did not

* Warm.

see how the priest could escape him this time. No one had lately put on this coat, and had afterwards lived. It did not need, however, to be put on to do its work. Therefore was he justified in thinking that this inconvenient clergyman would die.

When Gideon Cuyp was well out of sight of the Vicar, he stopped a little bit to get rid of some of his joy.

“Th’ co-at evven reeks wi fever—he’ll sartanly be th’ next. He sha’n’t wed her; he’ll be th’ next—that’s carpital. He’ll only be too glaad, I’s thinkin’ varra sendry. Wait a lile bit an’ see if ye’s glaad. I’ve hed a goode few er these mercies er late, a re-al goode few—there’s no disputin’; bet this is away an’ away th’ girttest—it is that.”

And as he so spoke comfortable words to himself he plunged along towards his home, chuckling and rubbing his hands to let out his gladness in the quiet places, but getting very grave and silent as he neared the open, where there were children at play, and fathers at their work.

Now it was very seldom that Cuyp got

caught in those traps that he set for others. This coat, which he had himself helped to pull from off five corpses, and bought at a small price, he did not keep near to his own house. Nor did he journey about with it himself. He put these charities upon the one hired woman that he kept, and who, fifty years before, had had the fever. Cuyp was careful that he should not be stricken; and, although he used what he believed was an infallible preventive, he only touched such things as were trade risks.

“Deb, ye’ll fint a co-at harped* oop in paaper at aald Betty’s; tak’ it ta th’ parson’s, an’ there’ll be nowt ta say when ye leaves it.”

So the coat was left that evening at the vicarage; and Guy Melchior carried it up to his own room, and it was there until the Friday morning.

Then after two days was Undine’s funeral.

No one could remember anything at all like to it before at Black Moss. From the abbey-gates to the churchyard—a long mile—the road was lined by those, old and

* Wrapped.

young, who had come from many places round, even in the midst of the fever, to see the last of that valley's queen. There were the halt and the blind—carried and led, and there were their children's children. Nearly all had contrived to find a bit of black ; but the mourning they had put on for her was in their hearts.

The corpse was carried by eight big statesmen, who had offered their services to bear the body, from eight parishes amongst those hills ; and behind the coffin, before the noiseless, swelling crowd, tearless and ghastly pale, went the childless woman. Behind that silent, that scorching agony—behind that awful anguish, there were no tears—that night had fallen upon her in the which there was no dew. She walked on by Minna Norman, who crept beside her. She was in the shadowy past, where a lovely image floated. Her thoughts were not going on to that open pit : she was living snatches of those eighteen years of love and hope again ; and there was nothing but a wild look, and sometimes a sigh, to show where she was

straying, as though the dream she dreamed was nearly past, and she knew that her darling had gone from her indeed.

“It weel keel her; it weel keel her,” under their breath, whispered one to the other those who had come together; and they murmured a hushed murmur, “God hod* ye, ma lady,” and then little ones, lifted up by their elders and their foreelders, flung tiny wreaths of the flowers of spring on to the coffin as it passed. Behind, covering the road behind, came *her* whole people. It was *their* queen who was going to be shut out for ever from the sight of their eyes. And then, before it all, with his staff topped with brass, with his great white tie, and his trade gloves, the one on, the other yet unstretched, with his best gait, went Gideon Cuyp. Surely in the front of that it was his place to be, for was not this his work? Had he not fetched this crowd from the fells? Had he not done this devilish thing? It was good for him—good for his body—that he was so well respected.

* Hold.

Then he was safe and whole; but, it was quite a little likely, he might get to be proclaimed the author of this tragedy. He could not think of this and carry himself in the van as it beseemed him he should.

"They wud rend ma; they wud tear ma inta bits if they knaad owt about it," he once thought, as he heard the heavy tread of the eight big men behind him. "Bet they'll nivver knaa; it isn't likely. Th' fooak is sayin' that it weel keel ma lady; happen it weel—happen they are reet."

And then they had reached the walls around the tombs, and Guy Melchior had met the body, and was reading the sentences.

A little while after, and the ropes had rattled through the handles of the coffin, they had been drawn up, and Undine lay there in her cold, clay bed.

"Dust to dust—" and there went up from the grave's mouth a wild and an awful scream.

"No!" shrieked the childless woman, pointing down to the oak on which the sun

was shining. "No! my darling will never be *that*—never! never!"

And this was all she said. Gently did Minna lead her away to her home, and then the service went on to the end.

"It's saafe ta be es goode es a 'vartisement, it is that," thought Cuypp to himself. "A gae lock er fooak weel be thinkin' it's awe me lead th' lady wes meanin'."

After this, they began to throw in the great clay lumps, until the pit was filled.

"It's a dry job; it is, hawivver," said the sexton, as he disposed the earth and beat it into shape with his shovel.

And then, when the stone was set up over her head, all would be done, and Undine would be left sleeping her sweet sleep under the daisies till the trumpet call should wake her.

Guy Melchior lingered at the churchyard gate long after the many people had streamed away. The terrible scene of that afternoon was haunting him as he had never been haunted before. He could not shut it out. Wherever he looked he saw that sorrowing

woman when she had cried out that cry, and had afterwards been dumb; and whilst he yet asked God to have her in His keeping, the undertaker, with the pall put up under his arm, stopped, and got himself together for a little speech.

“It hes bin a lile o’er mooch for oos awe, Mr. Melchior; I’s fairly nowt left imma.* I’s feet ta greet † messel’.”

And Cuyp’s little voice did shake, to show how fit he was to bring off the threatening tears.

“God keep that lonely woman, Mr. Cuyp. It is after her that my heart has gone.”

“There’s ni desputin’ it; there’s ni desputin’ it, Mr. Melchior. It’s a sad set for ma lady, an’ likely ta croosh her; bet a be-think ma ye’s nit lookin sooa varra weel yerssel’; ye moosn’t tak’ on in sick a way, ye moosn’t sooa.”

And the undertaker caused it to be seen that he was greatly troubled about the vicar; but he did not cause it to be seen that he was only looking for the signs of that fire which he knew were in him.

* In me.

† Cry.

"I am not well ; I am very far from well this afternoon, Mr. Cuyp," said the vicar, as he went out at the gate.

Gideon Cuyp now hitched himself up to look over the wall after him.

"Aye, soore th' fire's in him ; he's gittan it et last. I've hed ma share oot er this job, a bethink ma."

Then he got down from the wall, and followed the vicar along the road.

When it was told about the next morning that Guy Melchior had got the fever, it seemed as though the great and thick gloom which was hanging over Black Moss was never again to be lifted up. And when it was presently passed from one to another that the worst symptoms were crowding on, his people, who now knew that they could not bear the place without him, shrank from believing in it. Was he too to be taken away from them? And so it was that that day through they never ceased to hang about the house in the which he was lying.

But it was very true that he had got the fever, and it was very true that he had been

stricken down with typhus in its very deadliest form.

When Cuyp came to hear that the vicar was sick, he did not think that there was any need to doubt it; but in the face of all the people he did, nevertheless, doubt it exceedingly.

“Why, yon co-at evven gi’ed it ta a goode few afoore it ivver gi’ed it ta him; it nivver playud* treeks wimma, didn’t that co-at; it nivver offered.”

On the third day after this, it was said through Black Moss that Guy Melchior was given up; but on the fourth, he was a little better. He had told the old woman, his servant, when he was taken sick that, whatever might come to him, he would have brandy. The doctor, who heard of it, only shook his head, and said, “Nothing can save him—he is dying. Only his friends might like to hear that the brandy was tried, so let him have it.”

And he did, but not because of his friends, for when they were counted up there was only one.

* Played.

All this had got to the ears of Gideon Cuyp, who also had not forgotten the vicar's words that morning, and how that he said he would be put on brandy if he took the fever. So as soon as the undertaker had heard of that which was done, he went up to where the vicar was lying.

When he knocked at the door, there was no answer; and after he had knocked on and nothing came of it, he went round to the back and raised the latch, and so took his way into the vicar's room. Before him was Guy Melchior, in a calm and saving sleep, for the fever had almost gone out of him, and the old woman whilst he slept had left to lay down for a little while upstairs.

"He's gettin' o'er it fest enoo," muttered Gideon Cuyp, as he stood beside the bed, and felt the moistening skin, and watched the soft and the steady breathing.

There was a bottle standing within the vicar's reach, the which Cuyp now turned to taste, and finding it was, as he suspected, brandy, put it in his pocket. Then he left upon the table a counterfeit one filled with

coloured water that he had brought with him.

"He isn't hissel yet, an' when he is it weel be a bit o'er late; bet a may happen es weel be checkin' this sweatin'."

So did he leave the clothes that Guy might get a chill; and then he slipped noiselessly out at the door whence he had come in.

But scarcely had he gone when the old woman came down, and the vicar slept on and took no chill. When he presently awoke, though very weak, he yet was conscious. He called to the woman to give him brandy, and when he had tasted that which was brought him, he spat it out, and set the bottle down, for he knew that something must be wrong.

"Throw this away, and let me have another bottle, for this does not seem to be right, Biddy."

"It's evven th' saam es ye hev' bin soopin' awe aleang, Mr. Melchior."

Guy Melchior could not answer her, for the thought that was then upon him.

The next day he had mended greatly. The news that he was well out of danger soon began to spread, and in the end Gideon Cuyp, who now was thinking this hateful priest would not die but live, went up to the vicarage to see if it was true.

Before he set out, he chanced to meet with Minna Norman, who thought many excellent things of the Vicar of Black Moss, because of his office. She was very sure it was only because of that. And when she met with Cuyp, there were tears in her eyes as she tried to speak.

"Oh, uncle, shan't you be glad if he's better?"

"An' is't sick a girt thing ta ye, lass, whether he mends?" asked Cuyp, with uneasy kindness in the manner of his questioning.

"Isn't it very much to us all? He is so good, so noble. If God were not in this great trouble, I am sure we none of us could bear it."

Through Cuyp's caress she did not see the sneer with which he answered her.

“He’s better,” he said, when he had afterwards returned; “he’s mendin’ fast; I bethink ma that he’ll live; a dae sooa.”

“Thank God for all his mercies!” broke then and there from Minna Norman’s lips.

“Amen!” said Gideon Cuyp, as he bowed his head upon his breast.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH THE VICAR OF BLACK MOSS FINDS
HIMSELF ON AWKWARD GROUND.

GUY MELCHIOR only very slowly got back his strength. He had been laid very low; and now he knew he had been so low, that once there had hardly been any uprising. And when he began to mend a little, there yet was that which kept him back; and this, for a season, clung close about him, almost to his undoing, for he was only weakly.

A suspicion he could not bring himself to look at was nearly always in his waking thoughts, a great weight that would be suffered; and then, because he would have cast it out, when he should have rested it

came into his dreams. Some one in that place, some one amongst his own people, did not wish him well. Had Guy Melchior been so minded, he would have told to himself that some one the rather wished him very ill. Now it will presently be seen that the Vicar of Black Moss was not always strong, any more than are other men; but yet had he that charity which belongs only to the few—even “the charity which thinketh no evil”—that is not always to be found in excellently well-appointed Christian places.

Guy Melchior could not bring himself to think it was the hired hand of the woman who served his meals that had filled that bottle with the spiritless stuff. She had been a very faithful watcher through it all. He did not indeed want to believe that it had come into the mind of any one, of a set purpose, to contrive or do it. He wanted to think that he had been so nearly lost by a mishap. But for all that he could wish to sit in judgment upon no one; he could see that there *was* a purpose in it. He

fought against coming to think this: yet little by little did it get more clear; and then it was the hope that he was wrong was clean put out. He felt his skin get clammy when he remembered, however much he strove to forget it, that even sick Job Red-car had started at the sight of the brown coat. He thought nothing of it then; he had set it down to the state in the which Job then was, and he believed that there might be some confusion of coats before the eyes of a man who had only a little life left in him. But now there *was* a meaning in it all; a meaning, too, that took to itself dark and horrible shapes, when he bethought him of the words which Job had used.

“Nae, nae, Mr. Melchior, it’s evven raank wi’ fever; an’ a tak’ it Mr. Cuyp sud knaa, es well es messel’, happen better, that this co-at hes coom’d away frae th’ fooak that hed died er th’ fever. I’ll hev nowt ta dae wi’ it.”

Did Gideon Cuyp know this? Did he know how terrible a coat this one was? Guy Melchior was very sure when Job had

said that thing, that the undertaker did not. But now, when this questioning of his own heart would not be still; when, whether he slept or was abroad, it stood ever before him grimacing for an answer, he could only at nights bury his face in the clothes, and by day bury it in his hands, to try and shut it out. Once it had so dogged him that he found himself pressed with the awful thought, which shouted in his ears, "If Gideon Cuyp has done this he has gotten blood upon his hands; if he has done this thing, then is he a murderer!"

Now it is not demanded of a priest that he should at no time become another man's accuser; yet, it is, indeed, well that he should not hurry his indictment, and that he should be slow to interpret harshly that which has even a dark seeming about it. And so Guy Melchior asked of himself, did a suspicion, such as was this, seem to fit the life of one who walked so straight as Gideon Cuyp? And he answered, no. But for all that he so answered, the struggle that was within him kept him back, and therefore it came to

be that he was long a little ailing. For whilst the vicar was fully purposed to make public no suspicion that he had gotten from that indifferent liver and cunning swiller, Job Redcar, yet was he minded that if Gideon Cuypp, like this, should seem to slip again, then, even because of his office, would he be the first to accuse him.

As the spring wore on the fever began to abate. It might have been because there were scarcely any more in that place of whom it could take hold. In the end, there was, indeed, hardly a man, woman, or child that had not had it. More than twenty-five per cent. of the whole population in and about the valley and gap of Black Moss it was said were swept away by this fever. Such as were not dead had been so near to dying, that they looked almost as though they had come up out of their graves; and it seemed it might be long enough before ever the places of those who were gone would be filled again.

Therefore did Gideon Cuypp begin at times to think that, on the whole, he had

something overdone it. The ready-money trade he had been doing was a great one, and none of the mourners had come to him to ask for time to complete the payments. Yet had he gone about his work with too great a greed, and he knew that he had done so now. If it chanced to be true, as he often heard in the churchwardens' pew in the church it was, that people might, and should be, born again, no preacher he ever heard, at any rate, had said that it was, after any sort, possible to be buried more than once.

There had been no competition; nothing snatched away by any other furnisher of funerals that Cuyyp would have cared to have; so that on this score he could not grieve. He had buried them all—all that could pay; and such as could not, or were doubtful, he left to those sharks in his own trade as would take the risks he would not touch.

If some of the people in Black Moss had gone on living too long, it might so have chanced that some one of their number

would have buried him. Gideon Cuyyp had never had nearly such a time as this before ; but there was just this on the other side, if it went on too long after this beginning, he would, it might be, have to shut out of his calculation and his reckoning, all the chances of ever, at any time, getting a stranger or a visitor to bury, and he would have to look alone to the resident population, and to county mortality ; and the signs that he had done too much were already such as he could see.

There had, indeed, been awkward letters about it in the *London Times*. Some of the Medical prints had published articles upon "The Scourge at Black Moss." These dark and warning writings had been printed in most of the daily journals : and now that the early season for the fishers at Black Moss had already set in, no one came near to it who could pass by. None would follow the angle now, as they had for so many springs in the past, by the side of that stream which was commonly reported to be flowing with typhus. For miles

round the inns were empty ; and presently it was too late to say that the place was clean again. As it began to be summer those who had scarcely ever missed the fishing in Black Moss were now found to have fears about the heat. And those other ones who had wives, and who would yet have gone of their own choice, were not allowed to go. Some, too, there were who feared the rain more than they feared the sun. But yet was the worst to be. Drawers upon wood alone came near the valley ; and for the well-being of Black Moss, it had been better they had stopped away ; for after they had sketched and were gone, a picture paper gave an awful illustration of the dark-looking tarn.

Now these things were beginning to leave their mark, and Black Moss could no longer bear up against all this which was spoken, and written, and engraven against it. Hitherto had Gideon Cuypp done excellently well for himself ; but this taint which was on the place would also be the undoing of him ; and probably only a few will not go

along with him in thinking he was altogether right, when in looking at the situation, which day by day did not get better, but the rather worse, he said one morning, "Weel; happen I've bin a lile o'er keen."

And then he went out, and was sad because of the foolish thing which he had done.

Whilst all this evil was coming upon Black Moss, and not long after Guy Melchior had got back nearly all his strength, it became known that Lady D'Aeth purposed for a time to leave the Abbey; and rumour, moreover, had it, for more than a little season. Then later to this it was added that the niece of the undertaker was going with her.

Minna Norman, at the first, had found it hard to make up her mind to leave the man who had charged himself with her bringing up. She could never remember a harsh word, or a cross look, in the only home she could recollect. Indeed, it must be said, that Gideon Cuyp did excellently well continue this show of affection to the child

he had taken as his own. From the first moment it was wanted it had come out as a masterpiece. He did not love her, for she was not gold; yet were there many outward signs that he was loving her continually. He had set out always before him the business of getting her heart all to himself, and if he could do this she might get to be as good as money. He knew that if all her heart were to be his, that he could trade with her affections by-and-bye. She would be seeking him to ask what she should do before she answered yes or no to the prayer of any man. Then if she came to give her love hereafter to any one who was not of Cuyp's choosing, he believed that when he should say no, it would be enough. And with no uncertain faith did Cuyp believe in this, for faithfully fond was she of him.

It is, indeed, not unlikely to be urged, that, in a worldly point of view, for fifteen years—and Minna Norman was not fully three when she came into Cuyp's hands—a slip, or a chink, that might let in the light into this foul old man, could scarcely be

avoided. That Gideon Cuyp had the while neither slipped nor forgotten anything whatever of his part, it is only his due to put on record. But had he so slipped, is it for the young, the pure, the innocent, reared at our feet, to climb up on our knee and turn the bull's-eye of suspicion on the heart that at least seemed always warm to them? Are our little ones to pull off our masks, and tell aloud in the washing-tub of the ugly thing they saw behind? And Minna Norman was very young, and rarely pure, and very innocent indeed. The old man's foulness did not show itself in his benevolent hideousness. Had evil things been laid to his charge before her, she would have only thought how little this man's love had wavered, and with the story of the past she would have made answer to those who might assail him. She had heard and read of fond friends springing up, sent by God, to love and to cherish those who were cast as orphans upon the world. And had not Gideon Cuyp been very true those many years to her? Was she, who had so many

years been called his darling, to lay wait for him to stumble, and to say amongst the people, "I thought these many years that he was pure, and behold he is vile?" Are our children to stand as detectives up and down the paths of our homes? Are we to be pointed at in our nurseries before we are accused in the streets? What of the earth's sacred loveliness lifts itself so near to heaven as the simplicity of those who play in their fresh noontime outside the border of suspicion?

Now Gideon Cuyyp had not come to all his serviceable experience for nothing. He knew—for had he not been long feeling his way?—how he should best approach the freshness and the gentleness that would be ready, even with a hundred fond and sufficient reasons, for staying about him. But he reasoned whether or no the pear might yet be plucked, and he concluded that it might. The time, he calculated, had now fully come when it would best suit his purpose to put Minna Norman before the world. It could matter nothing, however,

how much she might shine, if her shining was at no time to be seen other than in Black Moss. He knew what that world, which lay far beyond the valley, would think of her—that simple, queenly girl. He could see its polluting schemes drawing nearer and nearer her. He could see its unrebuked voluptuaries slipping in hot haste from the pretty toys of passion to gather about her—most of them sordid, none of them pure. It was nothing to him, if, in the struggle to possess her, masked dishonour lisped out its pledges even to her innocence. This would be nothing but well, if it led to the gold after which he lusted.

“She’s evven a sweet thing, an’ a bonny—she is that;” mused Cuyp to himself. “I’d be a bit vexed, if owt coomd ta her that wesn’t weel; she’s a serious fine lass—she is, hawivver.”

And in that moment of his musing, in that one moment, the soul of Gideon Cuyp was a little way lifted up. A moment in a lifetime, of nearly threescore years and ten,

is not much ; and yet, perhaps, this man had once knelt at his mother's knee, when she taught him how he must struggle to be strong. It is not much, but such as it was, he may want it to plead for him by-and-bye.

In his own mind, Gideon Cuyp had already chosen for her. A rich man's mistress, with the settlements regular ; but not the lawful countess of a poor earl. He would the rather that she married. He would, it might be, take a little less for her to be bargained away in marriage, but anyhow she must be bargained away.

And he could let this bright, this unsuspecting, peerless girl, come at morning and at night to his lips for a kiss—to his knee for a caress. He could, and he would, think of her trust, her gentleness, her faith in all that was pure, withered, struck down, but flanked with the gold that was to come into his money-bags. He could take her in his arms, and call her his very own ; and then he could even think that he would sell her. And he could think that he would do this

thing with her heart beating against his breast ; with her pure lips, that did not know how to dissemble, telling to him, as she almost in her coaxing prayed to stay, before she left him, that she loved this old unky so much better than she loved any one else in the whole world. And Cuyp was very glad to hear the words that told him so, not because of the love it spoke of, but because of the power it would give him presently to dispose of her.

“ Don’t send me away !” and she patted his chin, and tried to twist his mouth to speak the words she wanted. “ I don’t want to see the world, I’m so happy here with you.”

But the mouth which had been twisted and turned by that pretty hand, did not speak at all as Minna hoped it would have spoken.

“ It isn’t sa mooch that, lass ; ye canna stay wimma for ivver. Bet looke et Lady D’Aeth, puir, sad, coot oop thing. Isn’t she awe a-le-an ? an’ a knaa ye wud be sooch a girt coomfort ta her. Nivver be cryin’, lass,

nivver be cryin' ; I's varra sorry ta loss ye ; varra sorry I is, hawivver."

This was Cuyp's last touch, put in just when and where it should ; and it told.

Whilst there was sorrow in another bowed down heart, and Minna Norman could soften, or soothe it, Minna Norman was ready to come to the attempt.

"I will go, uncle. Yes, yes, I will go ; please to tell Lady D'Aeth that I am ready to come."

"That's weel sed, lassie mine," said Cuyp, full of his sudden joy, kissing the lips which spoke the words that had so gladdened him.

"No, no ! not *mine* ; don't say mine, uncle, or you'll make me stay," was Minna's choking answer. And she clung to him and was not to be comforted.

Gideon Cuyp was proud of Minna Norman—proud of her, that is, in his way ; proud that anything so artless, and so good, should so greatly care to make her home beneath his roof. He did not believe that she would get spoiled even in the world. He

did not think it would be hard to bind her when the time should come ; and when he thought on this, so much the more was he minded that he would ask a great deal for her. Therefore, Gideon Cuyp was proud of Minna Norman ; for did she not the rather care to tarry in Black Moss, even when there must be so many golden homes opening wide the doors before her in the great world beyond ? He had coiled himself with a close coil round her fresh, unspotted, young heart, for his own purpose only. And now the “lile puss” of fifteen years ago was ready altogether to go and fulfil it.

That afternoon Minna Norman went early over to the Abbey herself, to tell Lady D'Aeth that her mind was made up ; and never, it might be, did her rare and queenly beauty seem quite so lovely as it seemed that day. Now are there many beauties, as there is also much variety in that which is well to look upon ; but the beauty of Minna Norman, then and always, had this in it beyond everything—it seemed to be so full of soul. It was not only because her features were

faultless—for that which is faultless in the face of woman is not always fair—it was not because of her features that so many rivalries would likely come about her. It was not entirely because of them that she would so soon blush under the mixed and cruel stare of a London season; nor yet was it because of her full, rounded form; all these, in a way, would set her very high—all these might, much too likely, bring her beneath the poisoned admiration of the butterflies, who come out in S. James's about May, settling upon every flower, memorializing their many loves in heated, halting stanzas, that might fill a post-octavo. But in Minna Norman all that was pure and maidenly spoke in her face; in her soft, warm smile; in her soul-lit eyes; in those eyes that were deep and full as are a fawn's. This might not be that which would commend her chiefly to sculptors, for it would have been hard to chisel that smile upon marble. But it must be that ignorance of the evil that is in the world, which will presently have to face the honied frauds of the *fêted* debauchee, when

he shall hope to set his net about her. And she, who has never thought that which would have sullied the being of a little child, she dreams not of this that afternoon.

Cuyyp watched her as she went on her way ; at the first, gladly ; but at the last, not gladly at all.

Presently Minna Norman came in sight of the young vicar, and the feeling which was at her heart mounted up in a moment to her cheeks : but only because of his office was this crimson sign upon her face.

Minna had not before now seen Guy Melchior alone since he got about again ; and so did it come in her mind, whether he too would counsel her to persist in going. It would make many things smooth that were at that time rough, to be advised by him. She highly regarded his office—the pastor, the priest ; and she was glad that he was so blameless in his life, that it could only do her good to like him, just as she did like him.

Minna Norman and Guy Melchior had seen a great deal of one another. She had

helped him, with a ready help, at the schools—for the work's sake that was done there, and for the vicar's sake a little too.

Now, in this thing that was done at the schools, Guy Melchior was not wise; he was only weakly, very much like to other men. He knew from the first day on the which he saw her, when his heart leaped within him, that it would end in his getting to love her; and it did. He said, "I am strong enough to live down this;" so he kept the danger about him. And then he knew that all his strength was only weakness indeed.

And Minna Norman knew that something had come over her; but she did not think to call it love. She believed, with a very full belief, that it might come to her not being indifferent about the vicar, and to this she had some time come. And did not everybody like him? So she was only one out of many.

Therefore it was that they had never told their love. They were occupied with other business at the schools; but their hearts,

not their lips, had spoken, and there the exchange of words was a communion.

To Guy Melchior, who now knew the mischief that by his own weakness had been wrought at the schools; and who, after yielding to that one temptation, had struggled as vainly and helplessly as it was only possible he should in such a situation, the knowledge that she, this trusting girl, was not indifferent to him, was that which chiefly gave him pain. He might have wrestled once; but now he could not look upon her coldly even if he would. It was not meant, he knew, that such as he should love. Guy Melchior had one hundred pounds a-year. This was the limit of his probable annual incomings so long as he might live. He knew that priests and deacons do sometimes marry for divers causes—even for other reasons than because of the love that is urging them on. But whether it should put him above or below them, in this matter he was careful not to be like to them.

Therefore did he put it to himself very

often every day, "How can I ask of her to leave a home where she has everything, to live with me so very near to want; whilst she has only to be seen beyond these hills to have every prize at her feet?" And he shuddered when he thought that one of these prizes might take that which he had not done well even to look at. So he reasoned and so he wrestled, but so he did not overcome.

Now they had met again; and in the mood in which they were, that which was inconvenient might be coming of their meeting.

"And is it true that you are going to leave us, Miss Norman? What is to become of my poor schools?" were his words, seeking to show that he was concerned only for the schools. Why did he not say this civil thing, and then pass on? Why? Only because in this great matter the shepherd was very much like to his sheep.

Minna blushed, as before him she never yet had blushed; for in her heart of hearts

she seemed to gather what was passing through his own.

"Yes; it is quite true that I am going, Mr. Melchior. I would a great deal rather stay at Black Moss, although I dare say the schools will do very well without me. But uncle thinks that Lady D'Aeth will be so lonely without Undine; so I think I ought to go; and I was so very happy here."

"We shall all miss you, Miss Norman. We cannot afford to lose a friend here now."

"Yes, Mr. Melchior; there is a great change in the valley and in the gap; but the fever at last is almost gone."

"Yes; it seems that it is gone. And I hope it will be suffered to remain away," said the vicar, who, tracked by that fearful suspicion which was getting so strong in him at times, the while forgot what might come of his letting that which he felt, but which was yet perhaps so baseless, be seen by others.

And there was something more of a hid-

den meaning even in his face than in his words. That walk which those two were taking there that afternoon was fast getting to be dangerous.

“You don’t—you cannot think that any one but God has kept the fever here, Mr. Melchior?” she asked of him timidly and searchingly.

“I would rather not say what I think, Miss Norman. It cannot matter anything at all. I have been ill. I am weak. It is nothing more than some fancy of the brain, that I am not strong enough to crush, and I have been ordered tonics.”

“No, Mr. Melchior; there is something terribly real behind those words. You suspect some one in this place of having kept and spread this fearful fever in Black Moss. I have no right to ask you to tell me anything; but do not think me bold if——”

“I should never think you that, Miss Norman; but do not ask of me to tell this thing to you—do not ask me.” And then he said, almost in a whisper—“You are

leaving us ; do not ask to take this sorrow with you."

And then, why did he not leave her? or, why did she not leave him? But they did not part, or seem to think of parting. And she said, as she came along by his side—

"I will ask nothing that you do not care to tell me, Mr. Melchior."

"I am not master of myself when I am tempted by this beckoning thing. No, no ; to *you* I could not tell it."

She turned and faced him, with her calm and bloodless face. "I see it now—I see it all. You will not tell it *me* because——"

"Softly, Miss Norman, something moved there behind that wall." And they both stopped and listened ; but there was nothing, nothing but the sound of the mountain streams. So they went on again, and she said, quietly and gently—

"It is my uncle that you mean. Oh ! say it is not him—do not bring this thing between our love. You cannot know how noble and how good he is ; if you can think that he is such as this—he——"

And here she broke down utterly. She had not been moved till now; but this, which haunted that man, was more than she could bear.

Now Gideon Cuyp had so contrived, that he was then a listener to those lips, and a witness of those tears that there were pleading for him. He had from his window, to his great unrest, seen her join the vicar. He had seen them walking on together; and striking away across a field, which he knew would put a high stone wall—such as is common in Westmoreland and Cumberland—between himself and them, he limped along noiselessly, and so heard all.

The vicar was troubled about these tears, and he said—

“It has come into my mind, Miss Norman, and I do not believe it has cause to come there; yet can I not resist its coming. It was a fancy left by the fever; but sometimes it will stay. And it is then I feel that I am scarcely master of myself.”

“It’s evven es weel a *wes* here,” said Cuyp, between his teeth, “or it happen

meet hev bin oogly. I sall joost git quit ov what may dae ma a meeschief, an' then nin can offer ta tooch ma."

The vicar's assurance that he did not himself believe in the reality of that which was haunting him, that it was only a spectre, or a phantom—the two things in possession left behind by typhus—sufficed to set Minna Norman at rest; and then, when she had dried her eyes, and could smile again, Guy Melchior led her on to speak of other things; for had he not clean forgotten himself, even from the first beginning of that afternoon?

"I do not think when you leave us, Miss Norman, that it will be for ever. You will be coming back to see your uncle very often?"

"Very often, indeed. And I shall work again at the schools, and play the organ—you will always let me take the organ when I come back here, Mr. Melchior?"

"But perhaps," said the vicar, smiling a smile that he did not mean should be grim, "when you come amongst us here again, it may be with a husband."

Minna Norman shuddered as the vicar rallied her on what might be, and turned pale.

“Mr. Melchior, I am sure you will be wrong; I do not think I shall ever marry. No, if I ever come to Black Moss again, it will be still as Minna Norman—always Minna Norman.”

She meant that she would never marry, because she did not think she would be ever asked to be the wife of him who was her first, and would be, she was very sure, her only love.

Where were the vicar's gravest resolutions journeying then? Why was he coming nearer and nearer to the ground that he had always, until this hour, in his own heart forbidden to himself? He who had fought so good a fight from his youth up—so often too against such odds—was he going to lay down now? And we, who are sitting as his judges—hard upon the weakness he has shown this day—have we ever trod near, or about, where he was treading, —ever resolved, ever girded up our loins, ever drifted

as this man was drifting, ever surrendered, as presently did he?

The Vicar of Black Moss found himself on awkward ground ; and then he spoke out, if not with the discretion that becomes a priest, yet as a true man.

“Minna,” he said, passionately, it would never be Miss Norman again ; “I have struggled this long time not to love you ; but I cannot help it. If I had not met you now, these words might never have been spoken ; I could never have loved another” (“——tion,” cursed Cuyp, almost strangling himself to keep his feelings down, as he dipped along behind that wall—“he loove her, he withoot a farden ; it sartainly caps owt”). “I had meant you should go away from the midst of us, and never hear all that my heart was bursting to tell to you, Minna. I have nothing—no friends but the dear ones that are gathered round me here. It was not for me, Minna, it was not for me to say to such as are you, Be my wife : come home to nothing—nothing but this full heart, and its changeless love—and only emptiness be-

sides. No, Minna, no. Yet can I see in your face that I might have hoped. I had always dared to think it was so. But from this moment you shall never hear such words as these from me again. Go into the world, my darling, and may that love which might have gladdened me be the light and the life of him who shall be the least unworthy to hold it. I will not, for I cannot say, Minna, shut me out for ever from your thoughts wherever you may go, and wherever you may be; but think of me only as a friend—only as a friend.”

He held out his arms as they went up through the trees that led to the hall. In a moment she was there—there on his manly breast.

“God bless and keep you, darling!” he murmured, as he bent over her.

“By —, if he isn’t geean evven ta hoog her!” muttered the undertaker, in a frenzy, as he looked after them, biting his lips till he brought the blood, and almost stumbling over a big stone behind the wall.

“Some one is coming, Guy. There! did you not hear that?”

“There is no one; it was nothing, Minna.”

And he stooped, and kissed her.

“I knaa’d he wud hoog her,” groaned Gideon Cuypp.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CRUSH-ROOM—MORNING.

GUY MELCHIOR and Minna Norman, during the little time that, in the course of things, yet remained, had no such other opportunity of meeting again under the beeches. The end was drawing on, as it was well perhaps for them that it should—for had they not gone something too far already?

Lady D'Aeth had concluded to pass the autumn and the winter, and that which was yet left to them of the summer, at some watering-place; and their first move it was resolved should be to one of the Spas, and then to Harrowgate: so the final hospitalities at the Abbey were being ordered. The vicar had eaten and drunken there for

the last time, for it might be a great while to come ; and even Gideon Cuyp, who was there too, much busied in seeing how it was with Guy and Minna over these closing proceedings, was persuaded he saw nothing that evening in the glances, or the confidences, or whisperings of either, to add to the uneasiness he had acquired behind the wall. He would, indeed, have been better pleased and assured could he have got himself between their palms when the "good nights" were passed ; but he took heart, and was at rest when he reflected how few of these impossible attachments outlived a long separation—at least where the links of the tie were other than golden ones—and nothing but brass could this hungry preacher bring. Cuyp, too, was further much comforted in holding on to the belief that some one with means would be found at Minna's feet at the proper time, and that her affection, or at any rate her hand, would of a surety follow the money. Therefore he sat back in the same suit in which he showed himself at first-class funerals—where no estimate

was given and no discount asked—and stirred up his tea, whilst Lady D'Aeth and he took counsel how Minna's interests might best be served. Then he looked on benignly, but not carelessly, and went home with a sure hope that the mischief had not further spread that evening.

The next morning, when Minna Norman, full of thoughts and resolves that surely but strangely accorded with the comfortable conclusion to which Gideon Cuyp had come the night before, was standing at the window of the Abbey—from which point of view could the vicar's schools be seen, as also could the vicar in the flesh when he took his way towards them—looking silently and just a little sadly over the still scene (in the which her young life had nearly all been passed), she saw a woman, with some hesitation of manner, come slowly and timidly up to the house and ring the servants' bell. After this had been done, Rooke the butler, just settling into his coat, after the manner of butlers who are taken out of their pan-

tries at mid-day, appeared full of his displeasure at the door.

"If you please, my lady, here's a young person who wants to know if Miss Norman will require a maid. She's come a long way, she says, my lady; but these persons always do say some such thing, but they don't come over me, my lady. I told her as how Wauchope gave every satisfaction, and that there wasn't no vacancy; but it aint no good; I can't get her to leave, my lady."

"This is very strange, coming about a place that is not vacant. I hope you have not left the plate about, Rooke?"

"No, indeed, my lady; there's only the mustard-pot and four spoons that isn't packed; and the plate's always in my head whenever the back-door bell goes, and she's a-standing outside. She aint one of your sort at all, my lady."

"Poor thing! standing, and it's so hot, and she's come a long way. Mayn't I see her, aunt, and if she's very tired tell her she may stay and rest?"

Now Lady D'Aeth, it should be said, was, by virtue of her new trust, hereafter to be known to the world as Minna Norman's aunt. It was better for both that it should be so.

"If you wish, my love, you shall; only be careful, for I cannot understand her coming here under the circumstances. Show this young person into the housekeeper's room, Rooke."

"Yes, my lady; but I suppose I'd better be handy, if Miss Norman should want me."

It is probable that some suspicion might have been justified; but then Lady D'Aeth would the rather have lost a spoon than have seemed merely to suspect even such a one as was that woman. She was being taken in perpetually, but yet would she neither call in the police nor a little caution. She who was standing at her door might be a true and an honest woman, therefore should she not be watched.

And this was the answer that the butler got—"You will not be wanted, Rooke; I will see this person with Miss Norman."

So they both went down together.

"And bring in something, please, Rooke, from the kitchen dinner, and don't watch her when you bring it in as though you thought she meant to steal," put in Minna Norman, as she came behind her aunt.

"Very well, miss," answered the butler, sulkily, for he did not like the work that was set him, and did not, therefore, make any inconvenient haste to go about the ordering of this woman's meal.

"Poor thing!" said Minna to her aunt, "I'm sure she looked tired. What a time Rooke is letting her in!" And she ran down the back-stairs to the back-door herself.

"Will you please to come in here, my good woman? Here's a chair, and you shall have something to eat presently, for Rooke says you have walked a long way."

And then when the woman was sat down, Minna said to her—

"We are very sorry you should have come so far about the place, because

Wauchope is going to stay, and I am sure we should have liked you—shouldn't we, aunt?"

Lady D'Aeth acquiesced, and the sad woman sighed; and then Lady D'Aeth asked her why she came about a place that was not vacant?

"Joost this, ma lady. Awe th' fooak oop an' doon ses as haw miss wor sooch a nice kind lady, sa a bethowt ma a wud try; an' a ex yer pardon, ma lady, for coomin'."

"That is not needed. We are only sorry you should have had so long a walk for nothing."

"If we should hear of anything," put in Minna, blushing at what the people "up and down" said about her, "we wont forget you. Rest as long as you like; don't be in a hurry to go. And here comes Rooke with some dinner."

And Rooke it was, who towered in, and sniffed the air, as though it were no longer fit for so great a butler to breathe. But, notwithstanding it was Rooke, it was on other business that he came; for he looked

round the room, and then swooped down upon a silver inkstand, glancing the while, with the coarse suspicion of his kind, at the poor woman as he got to the door. It was a splendid service this of Rooke's, and went home as it was meant it should.

"He bethowt him a meet likely steel it, ma lady," said the suspected, with some sadness in her words, as the menial disappeared.

"But we don't, and never mind him," answered Lady D'Aeth with warmth, rising to go. "If Wauchope should be leaving us, at any time, where could we find you?"

The woman gave her address, and then Lady D'Aeth went out of the room.

"Good morning," said Minna. "I wish I could have served you; but you will, perhaps, be able to come to me some day, and I wont forget you."

And when she had so said, she saw that there was dew in the sad eyes—in those eyes that had so strangely searched her. The woman grasped the hand which Minna had held out, and then the tears welled

over, and fell fast and hot upon it. The poor creature could only say "Aye, eye, soom day a happen may."

"If ever I saw the like of this! What a fancy!" said Rooke, with high pantry scorn, for he had seen everything and heard all. "It's bad enough having her in to sit about where we have our teas, she's quite nasty and mean to look at, and smells so; and then touching *her* hand, too!—Coming, miss, coming."

And he sauntered languidly up to the cook to tell to her to what uttermost degradation the service had come.

All this had happened on a Saturday; and on the Monday morning next ensuing, Lady D'Aeth, with Minna Norman, and Wauchope their maid, set out for one or more of the Spas.

Lady D'Aeth had some time found that for herself it was necessary to have change. Her thoughts were only dark companions. She could not bear to linger long on anything. She must have something to lead her away from the past; she must, for the

time that should be left her here, stray into fresh paths, where there were no footsteps that were known to her, no footfalls like to the ever sad music of a harp swept by the wind. And Minna Norman did this perhaps better, on the whole, than did even the changing scenes through which they went.

At Harrowgate they presently passed six weeks; they then came on to Brighton, and were a little later at Torquay for the winter.

Lady D'Aeth, who began to mend as time went over her, was set on doing for Minna that which she had purposed to do for her own child; and she was now looking forward to Minna's presentation at the first May drawing-room.

If the "little white angel of Black Moss," as Black Moss had always called the lost Undine—had seemed like a picture of sleep, or a melting vision, and was gone on its trackless way, yet was the valley not the less persuaded that it could show a companion picture which would not miss the prize. Minna Norman was nothing less a


girl of girls than had been Undine D'Aeth; and as now every day her beauty of face and form bloomed and mellowed in the soft south, it was not possible to doubt, that before her loveliness, all other loveliness, from wherever it might come, would have to pale. Guy Melchior had said that many prizes, many men of substance and abundant comeliness, would compass her about—and he had rightly said. But Lady D'Aeth was sufficient for them all. She did not mean that Minna Norman should be picked up at Torquay; and when she looked upon this fresh, and sunny, unspoiled thing, who did not even see how she had conquered; when she saw what Minna was, and thought of the world to which she was going, there was something at the heart of the motherly woman of unrest; something, too, that went on knocking there. And it was well that this was so. This “coming out” is not all a brightness or a joy. There are many sides even to the great glory of being set forth by the Court newsman. It builds up a good deal, does this getting up so

high ; but what does it also not pull down ? If there is anything that causes one to blush, then is there a peril to our child, at the which we may well start, and ask ourselves, shall this thing be ?

Nor, indeed, did Lady D'Aeth, with any sort of specious reasoning such as the world pronounces good, try to shut this warning out. Her experience of that which would come about Minna was an experience of years. She had been near to some of the worst pitfalls that society covers up. But she had marked them these many years ; and so anxiously, if trustfully, and yet not with too much faith in her own strength, she set to herself, without flinching, the life labour of standing between these pitfalls and this child, who was now to her even as her own.

In many ways was Lady D'Aeth a very woman. And so was she minded that she would show Minna Norman to the world, with no abatement of a woman's pride ; this Minna—for whom she often feared so much—whom she, perhaps, believed would

not be much profited by the introduction. Sometimes she said, "I will snatch her away whilst yet I can;" but then came the walk, or the drive on the parade, and the many eyes which followed her charge, and then she went home and was otherwise intentioned. But at other moments she held back the longer, and shuddered when she saw how wholly Minna Norman's sympathies and hopes lay in the country, and to how much higher advantage she seemed in the fields and on the sea-beach, than on the Torquay drive about the time of the show hours. But then neither would Lady D'Aeth persuade herself to shut out the knowledge which was asking to have its sway, that though the true companions of her new child's heart ranged through the whole order of our singing-birds and every sort of meadow music, rather than through the spheres of fashion, yet that when in those balmy days Minna did come out upon the drive, others, perhaps, were looked at in their turn and canvassed, whilst she alone was of them all



remembered ; and that so had she become the centre of a real sensation.

Minna went bravely, as it best beseemed her, through it all. Every day she liked it the less, and dreaded more and more the hour of inspection ; and had not Lady D'Aeth been set, with womanly earnestness, upon distancing the field at S. James's, she could scarcely have gone on.

Before such as this, scarcely was ever any woman yet, but—at the strongest and the best—exceptionally, quite inflexible. And it was in these sympathetic overpowering moments, when Torquay in full toilet turned itself about to look at Minna, that Lady D'Aeth's mind was the more nearly made up to launch her on the stream at the first May drawing-room. She was not going to be harmed—this peerless girl. Of course, a sacrifice did not of any necessity follow upon the conventional recognition of her superiority at the pure Court of S. James's. This was the manner, at least, in the which Lady D'Aeth used to put it to her own

judgment, till the more she tried to find herself at ease, so much the more did her responsibilities seem to look a little threatening.

But the time to hesitate was gone. Torquay was beginning to get thin ; there was no one on the drive during the crush hours. So Minna was asked if she still was set upon the journey to the Queen, and then they too went their way.

Indeed, the end of this was much as it always will be. Notwithstanding that Minna could have stayed away from London had she been so minded, she nevertheless could see that her aunt had this matter much at heart. And in these days of sorrowing for Undine, it was only well that she should have her way, therefore did it come to be determined they should go.

When it was nearly getting to be May they left Torquay, and went into a house, which was very elegantly appointed, in S. James's Place.

It was not, however, hard to see, that to Minna Norman, now that she was in the

stream, this newly acquired position, from the first, was not after her own heart. For the sake of Lady D'Aeth, who was putting away some of her sorrows with this change, she did not indeed let it be seen how much it went against her, and how much more she dreaded that which was yet to come. There was nothing on the surface to show what was going on beneath. It is very hard so to have to bear, to have to smile, when for very heaviness you want to weep; but Minna had gone with a purpose to her work, and she did not mean to tire.

There must be, for all this, a limit to our manner of enduring; over the bitter cup there will be sometimes a wry face. We cannot always suffer and continually seem to like it; and a general acquiescence in Lady D'Aeth's plans for going out into the world, for seeing and for being seen, was the most that Minna could do—was about all she accorded even to the most brilliant and dazzling offers that the season opened up. She, indeed, at times seemed pleased; but much oftener a great deal did she look to be wearied.

And now was the crisis drawing on. Minna was within a week of her presentation at Court. Everything had been done which could be done that she might rightly appear there. Never had she heard so much before of the capacities of *tulle* in all her life; neither in breadths nor in cost was there to be any stint or limit. But Minna was not nearly so powerfully moved as the occasion demanded she should be. Indeed, even the coming home of the dress did not act upon her as it does on most; it did not eventuate in that enthusiasm which is not often dispersed without the accompaniment of certain strong hysterical phenomena more or less disturbing.

Now, in this true history it must be said that when Minna Norman heard one afternoon from her maid's lips that the dress had come, she only answered "Oh," and then went on with the book that she was reading.

"But, miss, madame is waiting to try it on."

Yes, there in solemn form the dress was

lying on her bed, awaiting the equally solemn ordeal of being tried on.

Minna heard of the spectacle that there was upstairs with no other or more reverent feeling than that it was an inconvenience that she should have to shut her book, which book too had been many times read over, but which had been given her at parting by one G—— M——; and she felt that this being fitted was a serious infliction. But then it was not possible that such a one as was Madame Plonplon could be kept in waiting.

No solution of Minna's indifference is offered or attempted here. It is believed, on the best grounds, to be wholly without parallel; for as it was, in the end, not to be understood by that costumier of costumiers, the history of such marvellous apathy becomes exhausted.

When madame and Wauchope got to their work, the tightnesses and loosenesses were reduced; and when it was getting to be evening all was done. Madame stepped back, and Wauchope was bidden to keep off

her hands, for was not judgment about to be pronounced?

“Vraiment, noting could fit you bettere, mademoiselle; vraiment noting,” said the dressmaker whose deed this was, a French woman of considerable personal attractions at an early period of decay. She had by this time discharged every pin from between her lips, and then gazing on her finished act, or running in to give to some mystery a last touch, was abundantly satisfied that if her reputation—that is, her trade reputation—was only to hang upon this dress, nothing known to *Le Follet* would ever upset it. Then there was nothing more to do but ring for Lady D’Aeth.

Now Minna Norman did not understand the nature of this work of art she had about her. It must be that there was something more to follow. She, throughout the whole of the proceeding, seriously believed herself to be only half dressed. There were many things that she would know presently which would rid her of some of the ignorances that were in her. But whatever she might get

to learn, it is quite true she did not know then that those very low dresses, with nearly no tops set on to them, were insisted on by the highest people—by the people whom she was to be put out into the world to mix with. So she met this doubt that was in her with a very simple and modest inquiry after the body.

The Frenchwoman clasped her hands, as Frenchwomen do over little and great things. The girl before her had more about her neck than madame's other ladies would have suffered upon theirs. What could it mean, this asking for a body when such a one as this was fitted on?

“Mais, mademoiselle, c'est une plaisanterie ; it fits you, does this body. Vraiment à ravir—vraiment à ravir !”

“Yes, what there is of it may fit ; but,” said Minna Norman, indignantly, as her bosom heaved beneath the shawl which in very shame she had thrown over her, “I am not going like *this* anywhere beyond my room !”

“Et pourquoi non, mademoiselle ?” said

the woman, with a further clasping of the hands, for she had generally to argue on the other side, for "a leetle less of de figure."

"Wauchope, who and what is this person?" and as Minna's eyes for a moment fell upon her neck in the glass before which she was sitting, she, to whom this clumsily-masked indelicacy was something new, sank back in her chair, and covering her face with her hands, sobbed like a child.

Truly this was a very bad and unpromising beginning. Was it not insubordination even on the very threshold of that life where there is so much of prudery, and so little of modesty? Wauchope herself—that chaste handmaid, who was never known to have suffered anything near to freedom in the servants'-hall—Wauchope, who was so very proper, could not understand this business of the body.

Lady D'Aeth and salvolatile, with all speed, were brought upon the scene, and the motherly woman saw at a glance what was the offending wrong. She would have a

great price to pay for this dress, which fell so short of stuff upwards ; yet would she have given the price of many dresses that this distress should not have come on Minna. And she sat down and took the sobbing girl upon her knee.

“ I am very—very miserable, aunt,” broke out Minna, almost convulsively.

“ But there, she shall not be miserable. My poor darling shall wear nothing she does not like. But there’s a pet, now, she mustn’t cry. Madame Plonplon, you will have seen that this dress will not do.”

So soothed, Minna Norman at last stayed her tears ; and the great modiste was told that while certain concessions to the fashion might be permitted, considerable modifications of the prevailing style would be inexorably insisted on. The Frenchwoman had already set up her throne in that room to such little purpose, that she yielded on the spot.

“ Mais, oui, everyting shall be as me lady and mademoiselle do desire. I have made, let me see, twenty, tirty dresses—tirty for

next week—and they are what you call it, tout bien décolletée.”

Minna Norman shuddered when she heard from such an authority of the nakedness that was only nakedness to her. And she looked up and said, “Why, if they wear less than this, aunt, they can wear nothing.”

Minna had stated the case against the dresses exactly. The barrenness was very great, and the Frenchwoman and Wauchope got together the things that were to be amended, knowing that nothing could reverse the judgment of those ladies which had there gone forth.

But Madame Plonplon gathered up the pieces without showing her discomfiture; she would have *her* say in the bill.

“I wish all my very thin ladies were like mademoiselle; but dey do always tell me, ‘Madame Plonplon, a leetle lower, a leetle lower; more of de neck to show.’ A leetle more of de bones, I tink.” And when, after this lively sort, she had detailed many more of her experiences in the same direction, all

alike horrible to Minna Norman, she was at last fairly expelled the room.

Then, all having been accomplished in relation to that body, the day of days to many came. Minna had been under the hands of Wauchope ever since the early morning; but at last there was nothing more to do, and the chariot and the horses, that had been lent by a friend, were standing at the door, and had been so standing, the lent coachman thought, a good deal too long.

People who always know about these things were saying that there were to be a great many presentations, and these same people were also causing it to be known, with a grave seeming of authority, that the Lady Feodore Mounttrevor, only child of the Earl and Countess of Langdale, would be pronounced to-day *the* beauty of the season. Now Lady D'Aeth was well persuaded it would be otherwise pronounced.

"They don't any one of them know the card I am going to play to-day," thought that lady to herself, not in any way spitefully, but

only proudly, only after the manner of women, as Minna sat beside her in the chariot. "I shall trump above that dear good Lady Langdale."

There was clearly nothing akin to malice in this expectation of getting away the trick from her friend. It was dear to her to know she held the winning hand; but was not her friend dear to her also? She did not set her heart upon angering Lady Langdale; but, because she had this card, she was not to hold herself from playing it because the countess might not like to lose. After this sort, such women as even Sydney Lady D'Aeth do not generally care to lose.

So, after she had thought this to herself, she turned to Minna and said, rapturously, "I think I know who will be the queen to-day."

"Oh, do show her to me, aunt, if you should see her."

It must be pleaded for Minna, when she spoke like this, that her bringing up, however liberal, had been in Black Moss; and she did not know the language of courts, or

even that which is spoken on the way to them. Such simplicity as was hers is not often very natural; but in Minna Norman it was nature.

And her aunt only squeezed the little gloved hand, and said, "I will point her out presently, my love."

The chariot and the horses and the coachman were all of the best, so they were soon in the midst of the tide that was sweeping up to S. James's. The windows, as they passed, were full of the faces of those who had been bidden by friends to come to take luncheon, and afterwards to stare; and now that they had lunched, the staring had set in. Then the pavements were covered with crowds of rather a baser sort; there were upper and lower nurses, and there were all sorts of unprotected females who trusted to their own pushing, and afterwards to the police if this pushing should be by any one taken amiss. All these were swarming west-south-west; and so they would swarm, till the great miscellaneous block would be presently complete.

When some of the carriages dashed by—for the chariot in the which rode Lady D'Aeth and Minna was not yet in the line—it was easy, and not well, for Minna to have to see, as many of those duchesses and countesses, and every other variety of almost undressed peeress—unblushing votaries of a voluptuous *mode*—were bending forward, that the great Madame Plonplon, when she made that very open body, had not at all gone beyond the fashion. The rather, indeed, had she rebuked it. To Minna it seemed that some of those who were going to the Queen would presently escape from the very little that contained them; and, even as it was, without any such very imminent catastrophe, she could not help exclaiming, “Couldn’t the Queen let it be known that she does not think this to be very nice, aunt?”

Now Minna Norman had spoken this without any knowledge of the being of the Lord High Chamberlain; and therefore she did not know it could not be suffered to tell ladies how they should appear by any order in the *Gazette*.

Lady D'Aeth the while almost began to wish she had not brought this pretty innocence where such things are ; but she did not think to stop the way of the chariot, and tell the coachman to drive home. No woman who ever lived would have done this then.

So to get rid of some of these reflections, which were not pleasant to her, she began to point out the various great personages to Minna as they passed to fall into the line behind. And she also showed to her some of the little ones—some who were there only because they had married money. But there were not so many middlemen's wives there then as get there now.

"There goes the Bishop of S. Chad's. I see he recollects me ; he used to play long whist every evening when he was rector of S. Faith's. There will be a great many bishops here to-day, Minna."

"Because it's so fine, aunt?"

"No, my love, not because it's so fine—they would have come here in the wet to-day—but because the Archbishop of York is likely to be dying soon."

Minna Norman was in the midst of many mysteries; but this one was thicker than them all. She could not see how the probable early dissolution of an archbishop should be taken up by the bishops in this sort of way. Were it not better they should have been in their closets praying that he might be spared? So she looked up as though she could not compass it at all. And then her aunt added—

“They don’t mean any of them to hide away, or be forgotten just now, Minna.”

“But then, they are not glad that he’s dying, aunt?”

“I dare say they will grieve in the proper way when he is gone my love; but they are not to be hindered from making ready to take his place.”

The more that Minna heard, so much the more did her bewilderment greatly grow. And it almost came into her mind whether it could be that the leaven of the world had got amongst these godly men. But then she was so very lately from Black Moss.

“Look, there is Lady Langdale’s car-

riage," said Lady D'Aeth, as a turning in the street showed to them a chariot in the front, with the earl's coronet on the panel. "She's a sweet woman, is Lady Langdale, though a little proud, and quick tempered if things don't go quite straight with her. Ah, she hasn't been shown my hand yet, but she shall be presently when it's time to play it!"

And so as the stream rolled on did Lady D'Aeth point out to Minna those who were of any consequence, and those who believed themselves to be; till, after struggling, and pulling up, and then going on a little bit, for some time in the line, they at last had come to the crisis of setting down.

A gentleman had just got out of the carriage which was next in front of theirs, some of the crowd cheering him, as with a noble presence, he went in.

"There, Minna, that is Mr. Massareene, the famous statesman!" whispered Lady D'Aeth, as they neared by inches the great scene. Once, indeed, the eyes of the popular minister and those of Lady D'Aeth

did meet. The recognition was instantaneous, and he struggled up, losing none of his grace even in that press, till he got up to her side.

This, on the whole, was a good omen; Lady Langdale would have given a great deal if the favourite would so have struggled up to her.

"Let me present to you my niece, Miss Norman."

And the minister and Minna bowed to each other, and then there was no time or space for more, only except for a glance which shot across from the statesman; and after this was done they floated and fought on till they were lifted through the crush-room.

Some of those who were principals in that scene, and some of those, too, who were only lookers-on, had seen Minna as she stepped out of the chariot, and others there had been who saw her as she moved up to the Presence Chamber; and, as though every tongue had spoken of her, and of no other, in an instant every eye was fixed upon her. And they

well might look, and look again, for anything so lovely, even there, was never before seen. Black Moss had not feared in that day's competition to be anywhere but first; nor had Black Moss any cause.

"Lady Feodore is not nearly so beautiful," said one, who but a little while before had pronounced Feodore to be very fair indeed.

"She is very lovely! Quite the loveliest girl I ever saw!" was the verdict of another.

And so did Minna Norman, criticized and crushed, pass, blushing, into the presence of her Queen.

On presently getting back to their carriage they met Mr. Massareene, who by one of those movements that always seem like accidents, was coming out when they were. This meeting was quite enough to set it going that the popular minister, the man who up to that time no mother had been able to catch, was greatly taken with the new beauty. But those who better knew the minister could well remember that he

was always given to looking after the carriages of ladies; therefore was it that there were many contrary opinions as to what these things should mean.

"Shall I see you at the opera to-night, Lady D'Aeth?" he asked through the chariot window. He had bethought him to ask this when he had touched the little hand of Minna Norman as she stepped up into the carriage.

"Indeed yes, we shall be there to-night, Mr. Massareene."

And then the executive bade the coachman to drive on, and the minister went his way to Downing Street.

Now Lady D'Aeth had had great hopes, but never had she thought the day would bring forth anything like to this. The surpassing beauty of her lovely charge, acknowledged even in that scene where there were so many very fair, and acknowledged without any dissentient—except indeed, perhaps it might be, by the interested and the partial Lady Langdale. And then had not the popular, the *fêted*, the accomplished Massa-

reene, already shown some signs of an admiration that, with proper caution, could be got to grow? And doubtless, this proper caution there would be. So Lady D'Aeth, either when she looked back or looked forward, was very happy. She had played her card, and where was Lady Langdale's trick? She was glad there had been no going back—all had gone so well. But she was sure that that day was the beginning of even greater things than these. Yet now would she have snatched that darling girl away if she had but thought there could come harm to a single thought in that fresh heart.

“Shall you ever forget this day, Minna? Has it not been the happiest day in your life? And it won't spoil you, darling, as it would so many.”

Now Minna Norman had not been happy, but she was very glad to see that, through her, Lady D'Aeth was beginning to forget some of the sorrows of the past. If her aunt could so put away the bitter memory of Undine's going, then did Minna feel that

she would bear more than she had borne that day.

"I hope it will not spoil me, aunt, but——" And then she thought of the splendid crowd that had murmured pleasant things of her—of the many eyes that had all seemed focussed upon her—and of the marked recognition of the Queen. And she looked up into her aunt's face, full of confusion, when she said—"I would a great deal rather be back at dear Black Moss."

"What! doing the pinking for some of Mr. Cuyp's coffins, I suppose? You are a very strange girl, Minna!" said Lady D'Aeth, smiling. "The best admired, and perhaps the worst contented here to-day! But there is Lady Langdale and her pretty Feodore. She is cross, that excellent woman, and wont see me because I have played a card above her; so old a whist player should not lose her temper either over that. There! Feodore is looking this way now."

"She is very, very pretty, aunt."



“ Yes, she is very pretty ; and looks very angry with you, my love.”

“ Angry with *me*, and what for, aunt ?”

“ Because, Minna, she expected to be the most beautiful girl here to-day, and because she is not.”

“ Then, aunt, I should like very much to see the one who is more beautiful ?”

I have said that Minna Norman was a girl of girls, and now was her artlessness going to be tried more than it had been ever tried before.

Lady D'Aeth had not believed there could be simplicity at all like this, yet did she verily believe it now ; and thinking nothing of the grievous damage she was doing to the costly dress of that incomparable *modiste*, she, there in that chariot, threw her arms round Minna's neck, and looking with searching fondness in her face, she said, “ Darling one, she who is more beautiful is you.”

Poor Minna ! how she fluttered, and trembled, and started ; how she felt the shame of having so questioned her aunt that she could be answered by these overwhelming words ;

how scarlet she first turned, and then how pale !

“ But will it make Feodore Mounttrevor very miserable indeed, aunt ? Oh, how I wish she could know how little I care about all this ! Must I make any one else angry and unhappy about me, the very first day ? ”

“ You cannot help it, Minna. If you are chosen queen, those who have so chosen you will have you to reign ; you cannot abdicate in favour of Feodore, dear girl.”

When Minna remembered the face so flushed, and so sad, and flashing so much anger at her at that carriage window, she felt how hard it was that her unsought-for crown should be another's misery. She took the hand of Lady D'Aeth, looking the while beseechingly into her face, and kissed her with a tearful kiss.

“ But, aunt, I'd like to abdicate,” said Minna Norman.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CRUSH ROOM.—EVENING.

IN the midst of her conquest, she who had so conquered sat down and was sad. In the midst of the great glory which had come about her she did not feel that she was warmed. She yearned, with an exceeding yearning, after the still scene of her mountain home. Even as her aunt had said when they were together in the chariot, she would have joyed to go back to her pinking, to the making of those little pillows for her uncle's coffins. But she who that day had been set above all, she would never be let to go back to such a work as was that. She would have to reign all that season through, for no pretender could get away her crown; therefore was it that she who had so conquered sat down and was sad.

Minna Norman had that day been made to feel that there well might be a bitterness very hard indeed to bear, close too in the wake of a triumph the least coveted and the most complete. It is not very often that those who are so beautiful are quite the last to be conscious that they are so well-looking ; or that the verdict of the world anticipates by much the judgment come to by the self-approved. But the knowledge of what she was had only that morning fully come on Minna Norman. That which she had learnt in the glass did not in her own mind set her very high ; it might be because there she had studied very little ; and now that she did know it she would the rather a great deal that the knowing had been kept back from her. The life she was now bidden to live was not such as she cared for ; it was not after her own heart at all. To have gone in a stuff gown to the vicar's schools, would have been more to her wild liking than was that journey in that chariot in acres of Madame Plonplon's *tulle*.

It is not here pretended but that Minna

had indeed some time known how far unanimous Black Moss was that she was not ill-looking. But then it had never been her way to linger where there had been any chance of hearing more after this sort. Not that it vexed her to be set down as fair; she was not disaffected with her comeliness. In her heart she did not ask to be disfigured. But such gifts of beauty as it was told to her she had, she did not mean to be tempted into valuing exceedingly. Therefore, this which had come upon her, had come suddenly; and now she shrank, startled and scared, before the one voice which that afternoon had, even in her ears, to her discomfiting, pronounced her the unapproached queen of that year's loveliness. Now that she was in her room, and the glory of her dress had departed from her—for its hanging up in state had been accomplished by the judicious hands of Wauchope—she bethought her, sorrowing, of all that she had heard. She anxiously remembered, too, as she sat on alone in her room, resting her aching head, “All this will presently

have to be endured again." And then the things which had been so dear to her at Black Moss, even some of the spiritual things which she had learnt from the vicar's words and works, came, as she sat there, crowding on her. Prayer-time at the undertaker's cottage, she reckoned, was about the setting-down time at Her Majesty's Theatre. And then she remembered that her uncle would now have to say these prayers to the old woman only. It was well she did not know that the old woman had to say them to herself or not at all.


Now it was at that time understood, by those whose understanding in such matters is worth having, that an immense house would come together that evening, gathered round the Queen in that brilliant horse-shoe. It was to be a great night both for the hearing and seeing—for exquisite music and for ravishing toilets. Donizetti's tuneful opera of *La Favorita* had been commanded. And then, too, all the beauty of the Court was to come about the Queen. Since the great fight to get to the royal presence in

the morning, there had been time for all the forces of beauty to set themselves in order. On all sides had there been frightful rents and losses, but such of the toilets as had survived the crush room at S. James's, were, it was said, again to dazzle and intoxicate, that evening, such as could get to look upon them from those maize-draped tiers.

Lady D'Aeth, who meant that that should be finished there which had been begun at noon, had brought before Minna, almost with pictorial effect, the strength of the *caste*, the prestige and exclusiveness of the house, the number of its directors who at one time or other had had testimonials, and later, had been unable to meet their engagements, or call these testimonials their own; and she told her, too, of the bewildering fascination and splendour of the scene; and also that the consideration demanded at the music-shops for seeing this, or any part of it, was a very fancy one indeed.

Now all this, glowingly as it had been stated by her aunt, seemed greatly like to a whirlwind of words to Minna Norman. And

yet, much as the prospect of that which was coming upon her weighed her down, still she could not bring herself, by any outward sign, to evidence how much she would rather avoid than take any part in these things. She had burdened herself for another's sake, for was not her life henceforth to be devoted to the memory of Undine? There was a void to be closed up in the heart of the childless woman; and that which was in any way a happiness or a joy to Lady D'Aeth, Minna well and fixedly purposed should not, however hard this burden might be to bear, seem indifferent or wearisome to her. And in that she so purposed to do this, she purposed rightly. If her aunt had her weaknesses, they were such as are common to the strongest and the best; to such as order themselves the most soberly and with the most charity. That which was a weakness in her was none of it an offence against any moral obligation. It was none of it vicious, or in the likeness, even, of protected vice. If all her wishes were not wise, yet did they none of them lead where there were any of




the lessons of evil. Some women there are of high repute who, nevertheless, tell to such of the young as they may be charged with, that they may look on such vice as is not called hard names ; only that they must not themselves think to go near to it. Now, Lady D'Aeth would not so have dealt with Minna Norman. She would hold her away even from the sight of those things which society covers up, to the end that they may not be called by their own names. And Minna, who knew how well and faithfully she was loved, would have been satisfied to suffer silently throughout this season, or through many seasons, and, the while, to murmur nothing, so that the life of another should not be embittered.

Minna Norman, as has been seen, had unwillingly been carried up to a height such as Feodore Mounttrevor had been persuaded by many and great judges she must reach alone. So are the high places often occupied by those whose will is to be lower down. This was the misery and the weariness which pressed so sorely upon Minna now.

She was sad because she had been exalted. To Feodore Mounttrevor this exaltation would the rather have been ecstasy. She would have had nothing to do with any height if another had chanced to stand beside her. To get there alone, after shaking off the rest and leaving them in their confusion beaten off behind, this would have been a delicious and a delirious triumph; because it would have been a triumph so very well capacitated to give to another pain. But Feodore Mounttrevor was on no such height that afternoon, she had been beaten off by one who did not even care to climb. In the going up she had been left quite out of sight. And so she who had *not* conquered sat down and was sad.

Therefore was it that on that bright May afternoon, there were tears in the eyes of those two young girls, who were so nearly like to one another in their queenly loveliness. Companion pictures, too, their forms and features became in the next year's Exhibition; as also they became companion prints in that shop-window in Pall Mall; and yet how



great a gulf was stretching out between the sources of those tears! It has been seen Minna Norman wept because of the glory which had come upon her. But in the heart of Feodore Mounttrevor a passion and a hate of exceeding bitterness and darkness rose up and comforted her, not a little, on the over-setting of her hopes that day; and in the luxury of these scalding tears and fearful thoughts she found her compensation. There is nothing, when so frenzied, that a woman will not do; and there was nothing which was not done by Feodore Mounttrevor, even to many outward signs of spoliation and wrath, which cannot, for her sake, be set down here. Yet must it be told that when she could bear herself no longer, she tore off her dress, and stamped into powder, with her little feet, many of the family pearls—even of the Langdale pearls. It was not well to see her pretty fingers tear that dress, casting the little bits of stuff about—that dress which had come into so many of her dreams. Then, when the pearls and the dress had so been offered up to her feelings—when the

pearls were dust and the dress a rag—then, because she was not sufficiently appeased, she sprang at the bell which called her maid ; and yet she did not look as though she could have worked this violence, as though she could have done these desperate things. It was grievous that one with such a gentle seeming should so lay about her ; and now that her maid had answered to her summons, it was only to get asked why she dared to enter there at all. But then, did this get to be even a worse frenzy when she bethought her again of Minna Norman—then, indeed, she held her peace, for she was speechless ; she could only hiss, and stamp that little foot of perfect mould ; nor was it until presently she seemed to fancy she could see the face of Minna Norman, loathsome with some cutaneous malady, that she felt there was any possible reprisal that Heaven could order which would meet her case. Before this horrible apparition of her ungoverned hate she was something relieved. It was not, however, at all in this mood that later in the season she sat to an R.A. In the

calmest and the gentlest pose did she accord that sitting.

Of a kindlier flow were those tears which were then welling over in S. James's Street. Minna would have given a great deal, almost all that she had to give, and have thought it to be no sacrifice, to have been able to go straight, with the form of her abdication written out, into the presence of the girl who was even then tearing her clothes, and casting her pearls under her feet, and so nursing her much and grievous malice, and then have told her that the crown was hers if she would only take it.

It is not easy to believe that in her going with that crown she would have been well or quietly received; for as Feodore Mount-trevor had dealt with the dress and with the pearls, so is it likely she might have further proceeded to deal with Minna Norman.

A year later and there were prints of both in all the great shops in and about the West End. They were sold, were those prints, in pairs; and long afterwards, when the memory of that May Drawing Room,

and all that came of it, had clean gone out—then did these companion prints reappear. And in their coming again, Minna was offered for a guinea as “the Haughty Beauty,” whilst Feodore was sold as “Resignation.” This was the history of the prints—of the prints that in their telling of history had surely lied.

Those were the great days of Her Majesty’s Theatre. Nothing in the lyric world stood near it then. Everything was great that came of its direction, or went in at its doors. Then it did not need to be puffed up. It were better it should have gone out in its meridian, before that that need should be announced on its own doors. But when that year was in May, there were great stars, and the glories of the *pas de quatre* had fallen upon the town; then, too, were there the great hushed-up insolvencies of the great managers, or of those who only pulled the strings. But that evening was to see something greater than, even there, had ever gone before. And in truth the greater marvel was that everything behind the cur-

tain did go smoothly. Madame Grisi had not a grievance; and Signor Mario had not a cold. The manager, who was ever found in words to make a thing pretentious, announced it as "an unrivalled representation;" and whether, as concerning those things which had been, this was a true saying, yet of a surety has no such "combination of circumstances" ever since been presented in the same demonstrative direction. And then the prices, too, made it very select indeed. All was to be cream that flowed in there that night; and even in the pit it all was cream.


Lady D'Aeth had paid just what was extorted from her in Bond Street, and if the purveyor of the tickets had even asked more of her, he would have got it, for the liberty of seeing the queen—or, as it afterwards turned out, the queen's outline behind the curtain. But then these payments were also made that the ladies might come together to be seen of one another—to disparage one the other's reputations, faces, forms, and toilets. And if they did not see

the queen, yet was the feast of malice and all uncharitableness very great indeed.

At about nine o'clock, nothing quite like to it could have been found in Europe then, or at any other time. The now eclipsing glories of Covent Garden had not begun to make themselves felt. Every box reflected a patrician name. And every tier was a page out of the *crème de la crème* of the peerage. It was no place for the mushrooms; and they seemed to know it, for scarcely one was to be seen.

It soon came to be whispered, as the theatre was filling fast, that the new beauty was in the house; so that every glass was levelled at Minna from the first moment of her getting seated till she got away.

Now neither Lodge, nor Burke, nor any one like to them, went beyond Lady D'Aeth in the knowledge of the mysteries appertaining to blood. She knew and quickly pointed out to Minna all the wits, or beauties, or statesmen, or dowagers—who had the seeming of a last year's pippin—as they entered. But then she was chiefly searching



amongst the boxes for one who was not there ; for the places of the Earl and Countess of Langdale and the Lady Feodore Mount-trevor were filled by a much lesser noble and his lady.

“That dear Lady Langdale cannot be here and cannot intend coming, I think, Minna ; and yet I know that before this morning she quite intended to come ; but perhaps Feodore is to be *withdrawn*. It is very foolish to be so moved by little disappointments—very foolish indeed.”

It certainly was not wise to be so moved ; but then, when Lady D'Aeth pronounced judgment on the lady who had lost, she did not bethink her whether she might not have been a little foolish too, had Minna chanced to have come out anything but first ; therefore it was well she added nothing further about Lady Langdale.

“There, Minna ; he who has just entered is the Bishop of S. Bees.”

Now the Bishop of S. Bees, who had no prejudices, and came in the outward seeming of a bishop—even with his apron—was the

only one of the whole bench who ever went amongst such scenes. But then *he* never came to "Don Giovanni." He perhaps sorrowed more than all his brethren that the Archbishop of York was lying at the point of death, for he had liked him well; and then he knew that, come what might, he would not be asked to be the dying man's successor—no, not even because of his big brother, would he be asked to go up higher. And the Lady D'Aeth went on to add these further particulars about the Bishop of S. Bees.

"But then they do say—such as see a scandal in his coming here—that he does not understand a word of the *libretto*; that it is indeed like so much *Greek* to him."

"Is he a very great man, aunt?"

"He is very far from being a great man, my love."

"But then perhaps he is a very good one, which is so much better for a bishop to be?"

"I don't know that, Minna. That which he lets us see of his life, he chiefly lets us

see here. Other than this we may not judge him."

"Then why is he a bishop, aunt?"

This was a hard thing for Lady D'Aeth to tell; for in her heart she did not like to say hard things. But she could not hold herself from saying just this one.

"Because, my love, he has got a brother."

At this saying Minna was amazed, so that her amazement, at this line through a brother to a bishopric, was beyond concealment. And then, too, did it not come into her mind that one Guy Melchior, vicar of Black Moss, had got no brother; and that, because of this, he could never get to be a bishop?

Lady D'Aeth had seen how Minna was amazed, and she therefore now proceeded to clear up that which had seemed obscure.

"This is how it is done, Minna. His brother, who might have very powerfully opposed the present Government, had to be made powerless to do any mischief. You see he was likely to be at some time dangerous, which was not to be desired, as the Government

was only weakly ; therefore they made the very restless man you see a bishop, and the day that they did this, his brother became tame."

"But, aunt, is this how bishops are always made?"

"No, my love, not always. They are not all like the Bishop of S. Bees ; but they are very often made as he was. You do not understand these worldly ways ; but the object is to secure a safe vote. The bishop opposite always does as he is bidden to do. It is very grievous for the Church, but so it is."

The perplexing experiences of Minna Norman were gathering fast. None of the investigations she had made that day or night seemed to do her good, or gave her any sort of satisfaction. So she sought to know nothing more about the bishops or their objects, and glanced round the house to see if she could, by any chance, on some less worldly head be better suited.

"Who is that beautiful woman down there, aunt—there, with those three gentle-

men behind her chair?" asked Minna Norman, pointing as she spoke in the direction of the box of a notorious marquis on the pit tier.

"Do not ask me, my love; she's a bold, wicked woman. It cannot be avoided, I am sorry to say, that they should sit amongst us in these places. You may meet with many such, many such; but no one notices them. Do not say anything more about her, darling."

Minna Norman but little comprehended this saying, that such as was the beautiful unknown were not noticed at all—for there were those in that box who were leaning over her, while their talking and their toying seemed to be of pleasant things; for presently she tapped one with her fan, and afterwards proceeded in a like manner prettily to chide the others also. Therefore again did Minna's eyes travel round the tiers for something that it was not wrong for her to dwell upon.

"May I ask who that is, aunt?" said Minna, with some hesitation.

This time the beauty who was pointed

out to Lady D'Aeth was not branded with hard names. Now it was only a countess who kept some of her devotion for others than the earl her husband—generally suspected, but openly received. This one had receptions, and constantly “threw open her rooms” to a goodly company. Before the world was she very little like the other one who was toying there in the box of the bad marquis; but other than this they were very much the same.

Lady D'Aeth did not at all know how to answer to this which had been asked her. She did not mean that Minna should get any of this sort of knowledge—she did not mean to choke out this innocence before it had been twelve hours fairly in the world. She was not going to tell to Minna Norman that the *demi-monde* was very popular, or that there was any *demi-monde* at all. And, therefore, while she was in this strait, she was very glad to find a way out of the embarrassment by the falling of the curtain when the second act was ended. But while she was so glad, she also resolved that

Minna should not soon be put again where there was any need for her to ask these awkward and perplexing questions.

Then, after the second act was ended, came an exquisitely soft patrician summons for the favourites to bring themselves before the curtain—so soft, the only wonder was that those who were so summoned should have heard it; and then for a little season the *venue* was the crush-room for some scandal, and a little air.

There, too, presently proceeded Minna and her aunt; and after it was known that they were there, the house soon followed to criticize and pass judgment on the new beauty as she ate an ice. It was very early seen by Lady D'Aeth, that there was at this coming together of the judges, no reversal of that which had gone forth at noon; for by the one voice of that high-bred crowd was it concluded, that so lovely a girl as was her Minna had not been sent up for judgment for many seasons. The crush was very great; but then it was not such as to prevent Mr. Massareene getting up to the

two ladies. He drew about after him no less a personage than the First Minister, an elderly and very gracious Whig, of small parts, but of an astonishingly great family. It has been said, that he was drawn up to the ladies by Mr. Massareene, for his courtesy was too considerable to let him push ; therefore it was necessary to do the pushing for him. In all other respects, and in other places, were his threatenings and his orderings very terrible to the smaller Whigs, who did his behests at a great distance below him. Seeing that this was so, it was now soon passed from mouth to mouth that the popular Minister was for the second time that day with the new beauty. And it was so. Now the first Minister was nominally the chief of his own Cabinet, and it was only nominally that he *was* chief there. But Massareene was the favourite amongst the people.

Then, after they had bowed to one another, Lady D'Aeth was led away leaning on the arm of the affable chief, who was

without authority; and Minna Norman followed, leaning upon Massareene.

“And you have been pleased, then, with the opera, Miss Norman?” asked the Minister, throwing even into this the most rich and mellow tone that ever fell upon the ear of womankind.

“Oh, yes, it is very beautiful; but then all is beautiful to me, for you know I have never heard anything like this before.”

“It was unequally fine, Miss Norman,” said Massareene, who was quite one of the first musical amateurs in Europe. “Grisi only sang out of tune three times, for which we must be thankful; whilst Mario, up to ten o’clock, has been without any sudden indisposition, which is even more astounding still. But, if the wind should chance to go round to the east, he may even yet send on the director to claim your indulgence; and it may very well be east to him whilst it is west to us; with the unhappy manager the wind is generally east to some one of his company. Now, this house does what it

pleases ; but I do not think it will keep its place, for the best voices are not nearly always here. I was only last autumn in Italy, where there is at this present a young singer, such as this country never heard before. Duprez, Donzelli, Nourrit, what are they ? what are their voices to the voice of Tamberlik ? It is not possible that even such a management as this can long keep him from this country. And when he comes he will be, on the whole, well received. But then he will not be followed as was Rubini ; nor is it probable he will please as does Mario ; yet Tamberlik has such a voice, and style, even now, whilst he is young, as no singer ever had before. Still, he must not set his hopes too high when he comes amongst us, for there is only a safe *furor* in this country, Miss Norman, for such as are not genuine."

After this sort was Massareene always carried on when he got a listener who would hear him upon any of the things of music. And to him did Minna seem to have been listening well.

Of this loyalty to that which is genuine,

concerning which the minister had spoken bitterly, it perhaps was not so strange that he should speak. For had he not been very long accounted very genuine indeed—genuine over and above his best pretensions? It was scarcely well that he should seem to scorn the loyalty that had so long stood truly round him. He who was never out of a glass house had surely slipped to throw that stone. But then, had he so slipped only to that girl?

After this the two ministers went back with Lady D'Aeth and Minna to their box; and although it might be rightly judged that Massareene would well have liked to stay, yet was he not the man to court the observation of that house, or to bring his objects under such an order of criticism; so they saw the ladies into their chairs, and then went their way to their own stalls below.

But after the opera was ended, and after the whole house had stood up to the National Anthem—after, too, that the Queen had come from behind the maize curtain for at

least a minute, so that many were sent home with the belief that for their outlay there had been in that one minute value received, then did Lady D'Aeth and Minna meet those two great Ministers of State again upon the stairs.

Very stifling became the press; and it the rather grew worse, until the Queen had been driven away, and the people in the street had done their shouting. When this was presently past, the carriages began the work of taking up and going on in almost unbroken order. But still there were many who held back, and who let their carriages move on without them; for although the Queen was gone, there yet was some one else, for whom that splendid, jewelled, surging crowd were waiting, and, if need be, would wait until the dawning of the day.

"Lady D'Aeth's carriage stops the way," was the proclamation made by the linkman, as the chariot came up.

Then, when this was heard, was there a rush of many skirts and bodies, that were not afterwards the better for the rushing.

The true business of that night was drawing on. Many had come there having desperately secured some point of view, without any sign of shrinking from the cost, to get to see the new beauty with their own eyes. And now, at this crisis of the suffocation, she, whom they were there to look at, was coming, leaning on the arm of the most popular public man in England; and as Massareene led her on, a lovely line of the best blood, on either side, crushed back. Before them the Premier walked, with Lady D'Aeth; and then when they had gone, and the linkman had shouted out another name, there was nothing more that those who had so waited would get for their money.

But in that press there had been only one thought, one creed, in one whisper; and this one whisper it was Minna's hardest trial that she should have to hear. Yet had she gone through that day and that night bravely, and she was near to her rest at last. She is in the chariot now; and very glad she is that all is over—very glad that the curtain is down; very glad that those glasses, and

the cruel stares, even of the well-bred folk, are lifted off her. And very glad she also was that Massareene, whose touch she yet could feel upon her glove, was gone. For all and any of these causes was she glad.

But when that night, in utter weariness, she laid her head upon her pillow, Minna Norman scarcely took thought that the great sorrow which was hanging over her had begun in that theatre, or that a dark shadow would frown on her young life from that crush-room.

CHAPTER X.

FABIAN MASSAREENE.

It was nearly on this wise that the rise of the favourite minister came to be accomplished. Fabian Massareene had been an only son, as also he had been an only child, and the heir to great funded accumulations and a long rent-roll. His father before him had lived well and freely, but neither so well nor so freely that nothing of that which yearly went through his hands had come to be saved. Long was it before this only son came to them; therefore it was only fitting and right that he should be received with joy and savings, when after such long waiting he did at last appear.

The family estates of the Massareenes were almost a principality, covering some of the richest land of the North Riding. And

then was there this, which it was said could never be bought—a very handy, manageable pocket borough, which could be seen on clear days from the second floor front windows. It has been said that it could not be bought; and truly no buyer of such things could have got his money to be taken; for the payment would have had to be made to the owner—which owner, since its first enfranchisement, had been a Massareene. So it was a pleasant place to look upon from that window front, for not even could much money get its confidence away.

It will be seen that the history of the Massareenes has also been sometimes the history of England. It is not told when or how they first came here; although it was probably very early indeed. But as there is a picture of a very stately Massareene coming behind William the Norman, carrying his cloak, it is certain that from the first they were only given to perform the highest services. After this beginning with the cloak, there is nothing more about the house on canvas until many centuries later. Then

it is clear the State could not well have done without them.

A Massareene had followed Charles Stuart, until it became expedient that he should intrigue with "the Man of Destiny." The fanatical exercises of the Puritans he however practised with ill success. But, then, he otherwise served the cause, for did he not discount the acceptances of certain of the Rump? Then a Massareene, a severely Protestant Massareene, had been Vice Chamberlain at the Court of William and Mary, because that he had bestirred himself greatly at Brixham on William's landing. Then in books of their own making did they also live. A Massareene had written a ponderous libel, in quarto, upon Marlborough, the which, after some inquiry, was not held to be defamatory, because no one was found who could understand it. So this very veiled satire was not the greatest work of all the Massareenes. But then another, who came after, did write such things as were quite easy to be understood. A Massareene had lent money to Charles James Fox, at three

months, making no advance on the renewal, which was a State service of the highest sort; whilst, afterwards, the dishonoured paper was pasted in a chronicle of the Massareenes, by the side of some other like evidences of outstanding loans. Then a Massareene had been also, for a season, the domestic poet at Holland House; but the pretty rhyming of that bard was not afterwards given to the town, for which, of course, there might be many reasons.

Such, then, are some of the more egregious services of the House of Massareene—of a House that had given to England that cloak bearer at Pevensey, that Samaritan to the Rump, that Sycophant at Brixham, that Libeller of Marlborough, that Loan Monger in ordinary to Charles James Fox, that Poetaster of Holland House. And for these varied and these splendid gifts, have they not their reward in the North Riding? Do not their possessions represent their virtues? Do not these things speak truly for themselves—so truly that it need not be added here how the race were further remarkable, in other such situations of accommodation and trust?

So it was, perhaps, rightfully judged that enough dirt had now been eaten. Therefore it was meant that Fabian Massareene should be neither an abject, nor a money lender, as those who had gone before him had been. Indeed the father of Fabian was set on getting a better name than, hitherto, his house had builded up. He was not well satisfied that he should belong only to history as a convenience to some of the more necessitous Whigs. It was true that the accommodation must be had, must somewhere be gotten. It was true that by these little loans, but great services, he, too, was helping to keep out the Tories. But he had sufficient of such glory; and he was beginning to be tired of being merely asked about to stop a scandal, or to back a bill. And he knew that because of his money he could do in this matter as it pleased him. To have affronted such an one would not have been a safe thing for them to do. So they let him in amongst themselves—a little way, and he was thankful.

Now as it did seem to him, as has been

seen, that the Massareenes, in all that they had done, had not been the highest sort of public benefactors, he laid violent hands on many of the foolish things they had aforetime written, and resolved that Fabian, his only son, should bear before the world a better part. And so it was that the boy was sent to Harrow. The Massareenes had been to either Westminster or Harrow, for it was concluded that there might be more temptations, perhaps, at Eton, to stray away from the family politics. The father of Fabian went for Westminster, because that its traditions had been always Whig traditions; but then Fabian was only sickly when a little boy, and his mother thought more of the air than she did of the traditions; and the mother prevailed, and Fabian proceeded presently to Harrow.

At Harrow the success of Fabian Massareene was very great indeed. He soon began to rise, and he never stopped going up higher and higher. Now, it is grievous to say that he did not rise as it beseemed him to have risen. He, indeed, was excellently

reported of by the head master ; but then so long as he was at Harrow he seemed to be what he was not. Generally secretive, and always mean, Fabian Massareene, hated and despised by his fellows, reached the top of the school. Now, it is not pretended here that he was either pure or noble, brave or true, for these he never was so long as he lived ; but then his abilities were even as great as were his vices. In reaching the top he had never been flogged, neither had he been warned that he was near to a flogging. So he got for himself all the confidence of all the masters ; and when he left to go to Cambridge he was told, as a morocco-covered book was put into his hands, that he left nothing but honour behind him. But the boys, who had been his fellows, added nothing to this book. They did not even give him a cheer when he took his way out of the midst of them. He had lied, in his life, to the master, but he had not so lied to them.

This, then, was the sort of prestige that he took with him to Cambridge, and this was how he came by it.

He had very early, even on the Yorkshire wolds, mastered the secret of never being found out. Therefore, whilst he never walked straight, he never slipped. It is, indeed, scarcely probable that any other boy had ever stood perpetually so near to expulsion, and so close to confidence. Had he openly stumbled once, then would many things have become clear; but then he never stumbled openly—so that whilst the confidence that followed him was public, his constant nearness to expulsion was known only to himself. His career at Harrow was altogether achieved by the way he ordered and contrived the disgraces which came upon others. If he was ever suspected, there was always an apology to wipe out the suspicion; and generally ended in the head master taking him by the hand, and by the birch descending on some innocent that Fabian had abjectly compromised. So he was early fitting himself for the work in the which he was afterwards engaged.

Nor was there that in his manner, or his bearing, which at any time went near to

betray him. "Now, Massareene," the master would sometimes warmly say, when something looked a little black against so excellent and exemplary a boy, "I need only tell you that I know you can explain this." And then, as though Fabian could the better bear to be himself convicted and disgraced than that another should be exposed or ordered up for punishment, slowly and surely, with the highest order of by-play, without the while forgetting one of the links that he had forged, inch by inch, the charge, without any straining, would be coiling round, and covering with guilt some wretched boy. And there was no escape. There was nothing clumsy in the way of his work. His victim he had clean closed in. This which he had planned had not been planned to fail. Not a voice in the school could have shouted an acquittal of the guiltless, after that Massareene had had his say. And then it was all brought home, so at least, it was concluded to have been, as though he did not like the work there was upon his hands; and after this he would skilfully let drop

some word about the master having mercy at the end; all of which, it must be confessed, well befitted such a masterpiece.

Then, in the course of things, Fabian Massareene got to be captain of the school, and nothing that he did when he had reached to this, ever shook him in the master's high esteem. There was a little speech made to him, and about him, when he left the school, after which the boys, knowing better than their master, walked silently from the ceremonial of the giving of the book in the morocco binding, and Fabian took his way to Cambridge. It was as well, perhaps, he did not hear the shout that went up from those many throats when he was gone.

Now that he had passed to Trinity the same sort of success was with him. At Cambridge he was as well liked and trusted by the authorities, and as much avoided by the men, after he had been up a term, as he had been at Harrow. But then he did not care that this was so. He had as much in his head as those who held away from him; perhaps more. He had come there to get

honours, not to be honoured ; and as he was getting near to these, he felt he could afford that many hearts should turn against him.

After a while there came a sound through the University of a speaker of great parts who had been heard at the Union. And when this sound had reached to Fabian Massareene, he was minded he would go also to the Union, and show to those assembled there, how much better he was than the man of whom such excellent gifts of speech were now reported. And he went. And when he came back it was as the first orator that had spoken in the University debating house for years.

Now that he had gone there once, he often spoke, and seldom without some effect. He seemed to be conscious that his powers were greatly in advance of his cotemporaries ; and always, almost offensively, impatient of interruption, he did not even affect to conceal his contempt for those who sometimes very badly cut his facts to pieces. And only in his eloquence, and in the elegance of his diction, was he at all above

his fellows. Other than this, in the knowledge of the things about which they debated, there were but a very few who were not his masters. He brought no heart to those well-rounded rolling periods. With him it all took the form and shape of speaking to order; it was like one speaking from a book. There was not even the faintest seeming of anything that was real in those finely studied bursts of indignation with which, whenever the occasion served him, he denounced the popular wrongs and perils to liberty that he so affectingly paraded. Everything was in manner and in matter well and skilfully arranged. His language, it might be, was undisguisedly selected, but yet with not too evident care. Then, too, the rhythm of each sentence was like the flow of water; nothing ever came from his lips the sound of which was not pleasant to the ear; and his perorations, often after the most elegant rhetorical models, were clothed in the choicest Saxon. But then, after he had once been heard, he never again awoke enthusiasm; that which

he had afterwards spoken, had none of it convinced. It settled no convictions; it determined no doubts; it made no converts to the side of "Liberalism" in the University. It rebuked no waverers. It did not tell on a division; not as did even the inelegant appeals of other men—of men who had great sweeping arms and large hearts, but who were, nevertheless, very uncouth and clumsy with their tongues. He did not like to know that stammerers, such as were these, could get more votes than the most majestic of his sentences. But then he was obliged to know it. And, altogether, the end of that which he did at the Union was not at all like to the beginning.

Then came that which had to be done in the schools; and Fabian Massareene, only because he thought so highly of himself, just missed running into the first place. The man who was quite first had not nearly the gifts that were so full in Massareene, but then he had also none of his self-esteem. So Fabian Massareene was only second

wrangler after one of the nearest struggles ever recorded in Cambridge. And then the Master of Trinity spoke comforting words to Fabian, and took him by the hand and wished him well, as had the master at Harrow. But the men were glad when he went out of the gates, and felt that they were the freer and the easier after he was gone. Now Fabian knew that he might have been first; therefore on his going out he cursed himself continually.

From the University he returned to his home, that his mother might look upon the son of whom she was so proud; and then he was persuaded that he must want a little rest, and that it would serve him well to travel. So he set out with the big cheque that his father had given him.

First he went through a part of the continent of Europe; then he fished for a season in Norway; and then he travelled for a while through some of the finest and loveliest scenery of his own country.

When he got to be twenty-five, it was concluded by those who thought he could do

all things well, that the time was come when he might profitably enter Parliament. And then was not the entering ready to his hands? So after scarcely more than a gentle waving of the arm from the balcony outside the second floor front, a deputation came in three coaches to wait on the young heir, and invite him to stand at that general appeal to the constituencies which was then so near. And he bowed and assured them that he would do anything in this way that they might please. This solemn form of asking the 150 voters for the seat that it was intended to take, had always, from time immemorial, been decently preserved. So, when the general appeal did come, Fabian Massareene took possession of that which was his own, with all that infinite grace which was meant to show that if there had been a farce, there was no need to declare it.

From his position, from the brilliancy of his career at Cambridge, as also from his conspicuous hereditary claims upon the Whigs, Fabian Massareene, from that night when it was thought he might belong to

Brooks's, and was introduced in Parliament by a Secretary of State and a county baronet, could get the ear of the House whenever he cared to ask for it. Of course, it was said his talents had a great deal to do with this. His aptitude for holding many men to listen to him was chiefly because he was so clever. But then his father's money-bags and acres had also something to do with it, although the great Whig party only cared a very little for these things. So it was early said that such a promising beginning must lead this astonishingly self-possessed young man into high places. And then it was also said by some that that which he spoke so well did rhyme and rattle, but that the beginning and the end of it was sound. But, on the whole, the sound was very pleasant, and the rhyming and the rattling in excellent taste, and therefore Fabian Massareene was well received in the House of Commons. And having got to be well liked, for he did not lecture or scold, talk for a place, as is the fashion of many to do, he did nothing, in any other way, to

set aside a very favourable first impression by any of those rhetorical experiments or accessories which he could see would not be suffered even by the son of such a father. Nor did he seek a reputation by any appeals to those Whig traditions which supplied then, and which have supplied ever since, the conventional invocations of his party, but which he was very well able to see only operated to the emptying of the House.

Now, the father of Fabian Massareene, and the Prime Minister were on very excellent terms; and so the father was able to ask of the minister not to lose sight of, but to watch his son; and although there is some reason to believe that ministers are not always faithful in these things, yet assuredly did this come of that watching.

The expectations and desires of Fabian Massareene did not for many sessions remain unsatisfied. The premier had said to the old gentleman in Yorkshire that his son should rise, and during the fourth year of his being in Parliament it so chanced

that an under-secretaryship fell vacant ; a few family divisions were there amongst the Whigs as to which of their young men should get it ; but the first minister was true to Fabian, and so he prevailed.

At this time Fabian Massareene was only twenty-nine ; and there was something about him which persuaded people that he would rise a great deal higher than he yet had risen. He was neither flippant nor insolent in the way of his answering, and he did not take too much upon himself ; so that after a little season he was quite the most popular member of the Government on the treasury bench. And because his prospects were so very fair, many of those above him were only indifferently well affected towards him, and sought to disparage him in the eyes of the first minister. But then the first minister did not of his own heart see fit to listen, for the influence of Fabian was beginning to have weight, and he would presently have more weight when he came into all those Yorkshire acres. So the premier decided to remain Fabian's friend.

Fabian was now put up to answer some of the great men of the Opposition in all party struggles. And successes came thickly one upon another. He bore himself very soberly and with temper, whether he got the best of it or whether he got the worst. Therefore it was that many on both sides spoke well of him. But it must be said, that, after having followed in debate most of the leaders of the Opposition, much of his modesty went out of him; and he even fancied that of his own strength he was able to be a leader. He now scarcely offered any concealment of his belief that the chief of his department had been some time *effete*, and that a younger than he should take the seals. But then the House of Commons, it was clear, thought so too; so that the vanity of Fabian was ministered to exceedingly. Yet was not his vanity seen of men; to those who looked upon, or those who heard him, his manner, so playful, easy, decorous, and dignified, seemed to be almost perfect. Still the Secretary of State, who was so *effete*, could yet demonstrate

that he was capable of holding on. So he held on accordingly; for in the edifice of the Whig families there is, of course, a keystone; and the *effete* minister was the keystone of the Whig edifice; therefore the premier in a friendly way explained this matter to Fabian Massareene; and nothing more was publicly said about the *effete* secretary.

In the midst of this beginning the Tory party came back with irresistible power. They had a majority in both Houses. They were popular out of doors; and there were signs that the people would have them to remain; for there were many seats which would presently be theirs. So for a season the Whigs were without hope.

Fabian Massareene felt that this which was come upon him was very hard to bear; worse to bear than being under that *effete* secretary; for had he not been almost within reach even of Cabinet fruits, and was he not now told that he might be never able to pluck them? But when he had been so well hated at Harrow and at Tri-

nity, he had not been cast down. He had not cared for the cold shade of the suspicion of his fellows then, and he was not going to be cast down now. So he went to the other side of the Speaker's chair, minded that even in that cold shade he would make himself felt. He soon found that he could do this thing with great satisfaction to himself, and that he had probably never been before so entirely at his ease as he was now in opposition. The mind of Fabian Massareene was not after any sort administrative. There is even some reason to fear that those who conceived his speeches to rhyme and to rattle well, and to carry nothing else, did not desire to be in a minority such as they were in. It was not in originating a programme, or in consummating a policy, but by the imputation of motives, in brilliant periods, and in pleasant cadences, that Fabian Massareene the best succeeded. But then was there nothing of the seeming of bitterness; no one thought to tell him that he was set on stinging. It was even as though his philanthropy was so catholic,

that he saw how every one was being wronged, and that he could not rest until they were easy. He caused others to cower down; he made others to writhe; but then it was not seen that of any set purpose he so made them to cower down and writhe. As it had been with the Master at Harrow, and the Master of Trinity, so was it now with the public men of England. They all thought well of him, and some talked of his mind, some of his gifts of speech; but they all said the same things about the purity of his motives and his objects; they all agreed what sort of heart that was which beat beneath that coat. And this agreement amongst these men was very nice to Fabian Massareene; for it was not likely they would ever get to see what there might be beneath that coat. Therefore he knew that he was safe, so long as he did not slip.

Now the manner of the speech of Fabian Massareene was not at all after the manner of the speech of those of his friends who sat near and about him. The things that he imputed to others he did not impute in

the confused and palsied periods so dear to his leaders, and which have been so dear to other Whigs who have been very forward since. But then, too, it was all done as if it gushed up his throat, even from his heart of hearts, and was in nowise to be stopped. It was all breathed forth with a seeming sincerity that was very affecting, and which touched many witnesses. And he did it with extraordinary and fluent power ; and there was great grace in all that he did, and his voice was mellow and soft, and could do everything with much skill that it was set to do. It could fill the Parliament House with its rich ringing tones, and it could fall to a pleasant whispering that would not have seemed harsh in a chamber. And then the presence of Fabian Massareene was such as is only the belonging of a very few. There was that, too, in his form and features that even men could not lightly regard, and which was very perilous for women to look on. But then they did too often look, and were lost.

His arrangement of the counts against

any one of his opponents in the House of Commons was not susceptible to any accident that parliamentary debate was capable of offering. His impromptus did not seem to be studied, although there were only a very few that were not prepared. It always seemed to be grievous to him when he was not commending; but then he always so contrived that his blandness should cover up his bitterness. He would come down to Parliament charged with the most solemn warnings, of which it was a necessity that he should be instantly delivered; and then, with trembling voice and nervous eagerness, he would throw out with excellently assumed uneasiness, unaffected apprehensions of the country's degradation in Tory hands. His points, if always vulnerable, were yet never wholly exaggerations. But, as in the debating house at Cambridge, the sympathies of certain of those who listened were at no time cordially with him. From his first beginning he knew there had been some who had got to see what was under his outward seeming. He bethought him there

must somewhere be a chink which was letting in the light. But in all those years he had not found it. Therefore, on the whole, he was not satisfied to be only as greatly popular as he even was.

Now those who did not think so well of Fabian Massareene were given to say that the hollowness of all that he did was very easy to be seen, and that all men ought to see it. To them, all that he did was as the lifeless mimicry of the grandest instincts. They did not at all seek to contend that the rhythm and the flow were not faultless, or that the action with which he acted was not always imposing, and sometimes very fine; but then it did not persuade them to think or to vote with him; they were sure it was very beautiful, and after many of the first masters—they only did not believe in him; that was all.

It, however, came to pass that the Tories, in the face of all this declamation, kept their places, and were not even discoloured by his worst denunciations; for when the Whigs did for a short season return it was

only to be again expelled. So Fabian Massareene for a little held his hand from the throwing of dirt which did not stick, that he might the better go about some other business.

And that other business that he meant to go about was this. It has been told here that Fabian Massareene was such an one as it is perilous for womankind to look upon ; but that they came, and looked, and so were lost. It will presently be seen that in this matter he did not order himself or his conversation right. But so much the more was the peril, so much the more did women come about him ; therefore, now that he could do no ill to the Tories he cast himself into other scenes, and instead of manipulating the intrigues of a political connexion, he was presently busied with the frivolous things of a character quadrille of the "seasons" at Almack's. Mothers and step-mothers, and others in charge, who for a great while had given him up, now saw that their time was fully come ; and such as they had to dispose of were set in his way ;

but then it is grievous to say they were none of them disposed of. So it often was that he was in one evening led about to almost more partners than there were dances put down to be danced. Was he not heir to great possessions that were not encumbered? And other than this, was it not that there were no mortgages? Now these are things from which it is not possible for mothers to turn themselves away; and they presently came about him very thickly; but then they were not cool, and it was easy for him to see why that multitude of motherly women was so very hot. There were, nevertheless, some who went to the work in better order; and these, in their own hearts, dissembled a little, and sought to persuade themselves that it was not so much because of his possessions, and his money bags, that they so greatly desired this young man would ask a question of their daughters. They desired him because of the life he was leading; because of his virtues; because he had none of the vices of other men. The possessions and the money

bags should not be left out of the transaction if any business should happen to be done ; but they were quite sure it was not because of them that they had at first desired him. So, at least, they persuaded themselves, and compassed him about accordingly.

In the course of things, it was only likely that Fabian Massareene should come to be spoken of at the clubs as the probable future leader of the Whigs ; therefore, of course, he would rise very high if ever he got to be at the head of the select communion of the Whig families ; and so, what with the known state of his possessions and his money bags, certain fathers did not think it was needed that they should interfere with any of the contrivings of their wives. If they moved in this matter at all, they would move with their spouses.

But then those bright and well-trained ones, to whom the orderings of these mothers came, they were well persuaded that they were not harshly entreated, and that the behests of those who urged them on were

not a trouble to them. For did he not move well? Did he not talk well? Did he not dance well? Did he not do all things well? Was he not well looking? So the mothers and their daughters went to their work together. Yet, must it be told that, somehow, even that combination had not prevailed. For, though many seasons had now come and gone, no one was asked of Fabian Massareene to be a partner of his, other than in a quadrille, or a cotillon. Nevertheless, it was sometimes, for awhile, believed that he had asked of them another question.

Now, one evening, it so chanced that Fabian Massareene had, for a second time, engaged himself to dance with a beautiful girl—which thing was pleasant to her, as also it was pleasing to her mother. She believed, from many signs, that because he had so twice asked her hand in dancing, he would now ask of her something more. Therefore, having been previously instructed of her mother, who, too, thought the crisis might be near, she was led away by another, repeating the very pretty little answer that

her mother had found for her. And now she was standing up to a mazurka with one who would have asked something of her had she not been so very cold ; but then she was thinking of that which Fabian would doubtless presently say to her ; so she chilled this other one, who could have set her very high, and was a truer man than Fabian Massareene. In the next cotillon, Fabian was, for that second time, to have had her hand. But before it came to be danced he was sought out in the crowd, and a very urgent note was put into his hands. A party struggle, that had been unexpectedly precipitated, it seemed, from this note, was not likely to be adjourned over that night as had been expected. There would probably be, it went on to say, a division that evening ; and the whip who had written this was very urgent in asking Massareene to come down to the House at once.

Fabian, as he read this summons, thought no more of the cotillon or of her with whom he should have danced that second time ; and he was even hurrying away, when

he saw the fair girl's mother watching him. So he crossed over behind the dancers, and presented himself to her, and told her why he should not be able to claim the hand of her daughter in the coming dance. He did not speak of any other claim, for any such other one he had never been minded to make.

"I am compelled to ask you so to favour me, as to make my excuses to your daughter, to whom I had the honour of being engaged for the next cotillon. I have been sent for by our leader, and were I to wait until this mazurka is ended, to excuse myself, I should, probably, be too late." And then he bowed and went his way.

Now this was almost more than that mother could bear. She and her Cecilia—the Lady Cecilia Carfax—together had prepared a very pretty little speech, which was to be spoken to Massareene after that he had asked that question; and there was to be no speech, for there was to be nothing to provoke it. Then it was too late for her Cecilia to make that little speech to the man

who was leading her about in that mazurka. She could not be got to melt before the dance was ended. There was no doubt but that she had chilled him very badly. Altogether she was sorely troubled, that excellent Lady Cecilia's mother.

Every eye of every woman, who had a daughter, or daughters, had followed Massareene; and, as is usual in these matters, all interpretations, other than the right, concerning his movements, were put upon the audience he had had of that mother. Was he seeking some further opportunity? The face of the mother of the Lady Cecilia did not seem to show that he had sought this of her. And then it was inquired by others, who also had had their little disappointments, and who were therefore not always calm, but sometimes bitter, when they pondered on it, "Was he going through the form of asking for that consent which had, this long time, taken the form of an invitation?" So it will be seen that the going out of Fabian Massareene was not

for the peace of all the ladies that had assembled there.

And then Fabian Massareene did not come back. Neither did he come back into any such scenes, to the side of the Lady Cecilia, all that night through, nor the next, nor the next. So the Lady Cecilia, having again been instructed by her mother, did melt when she danced the next mazurka with that other one whom she had chilled before. But then he had not forgotten how, if this was her warm side, that she had also a cold one; therefore, as her mother had so greatly feared, the melting had not been done in time.

The division had gone against the Government. By the following noon the resignation of the Ministers was in the Queen's hands. But there was no dead lock. There were exemplary men ready to come forward, and ready to take a beating when their turn should be. By the end of the week, the chief of the Whig families had concluded to divide the more considerable appointments; and Fabian Massareene, as one of the elect,

entered the Cabinet. It was caused to be said that the Administration had come in "upon the shoulders of the working-classes ;" and for a time the country even believed in some of these professions. Massareene had now reached a position that gave to him many and great advantages. As a privy councillor, he was a new performer ; and judged as he was by those other ones about him, the contrast was certainly sufficiently complete. So the *venue* of his power was changed from the scene of mazurkas and cotillons, and managerial mothers began to comprehend that he had altogether escaped them. It is only, indeed, probable that they did not suspect that their mortification might the rather have taken the form of congratulation. They only knew how that they had set their net, and had not caught the bird that they were set on catching. And then they called him a cruel deceiver, and a wicked man—both of which things assuredly he was ; but his wickedness had not been done to their children, and he had not cruelly deceived any of their daughters.

He had sometimes come, it might be, rather near ; but then he had seen the net spread out before him, for, in truth, the meshes were very good to see. And then those mothers who thought to themselves that they looked deeper—even they were sorely troubled that the purity of such a life was not to be bestowed upon their girls. He walked so straight and so truly ; he would have made to them so good a son. They could not tell why they had missed him. At the last they thought it was because he had been too openly and too little decently sought by certain other mothers. Therefore they abused those other mothers who had not well hidden their nets, and were in a measure comforted.

They did not know how much the rather they should have joyed than sorrowed. They were, as were many others, far enough from knowing that Fabian Massareene could not well sully his life beyond its present foulness. They did not know how well it was no child of theirs should lie in that man's arms. It was not told of him that mothers should catch up their daughters as

he passed, lest his evil eye should rest upon them. Fabian Massareene was very pure before the world. He was not minded to air his *liaisons* in Pall Mall, or the Champs Elysées. He did not show to the world the arithmetic of his adulteries. It was not reported of him that he had ruined women before he was eighteen, and would afterwards consort with no mistresses who were not the wives of other men. The scandal of this had not got into the world—there his conversation was of bishops and the indigent blind, and of all things good and virtuous, and great and noble. So it is not to be marvelled at that he was sought by these mothers for their girls, as it has been seen he was continually.

And then years went on, and Fabian was nearing to middle age. Sometimes he was of the “ins,” and sometimes of the “outs;” but, on the whole, things political had prospered with him. The coming, however, of Minna Norman across his path set to him an earnest question that he was for the first time not slow to answer. He had never seen any one like to her at all. In the matter of taking to himself a wife, he bethought

him that the best would not be too good for him; and he believed that Minna Norman might be even worthy of him, if he should proceed to tell her how high he meant to set her. Then it would be pleasing to his mother, who was now of a great age, and was getting to be troubled as to who should have her diamonds. He had been lately pressed by his mother to settle, because of these diamonds; and by his father he had been urged to think about an heir. Therefore, after he had seen Minna at S. James's, and after he had seen her into her chariot on that great night outside Her Majesty's Theatre, he had said to himself, "I will make of this girl my wife. The diamonds shall descend and I will have an heir." He did not say to himself that loving her, and forsaking all others, he would cleave to her only so long as he lived. But yet would he take on his lips vows that he would do this thing. He did not believe it would be needed that he should altogether ask her. He well remembered the many mothers' darlings in those years that had gone by, who had been flung in his way; and in their hearts there

was not one of them who had not *asked* of him. So he did not doubt but that it would be as he ordered; and then he bethought him that after Parliament was up he would be married.

When, therefore, he had concluded what he would do, he was nearly every day at S. James's Place. He could not as the weeks went on, however, persuade himself that after any sort would Minna Norman be asking him. She would take a little winning, but of this he was very sure, that she would wear the diamonds at last.

Then came the end of June, and Fabian Massareene had not yet asked anything of Minna Norman. It was then that one morning the minister had before him certain questions that would be put to him and his colleagues that evening in the House of Commons. The Chief of the Cabinet, as has been said, was very terrible to certain smaller Whigs below him, to whom the thunderings which proceeded out of his mouth were very wonderful and awful; but they were neither wonderful nor awful to Fabian Massareene. So he did not take

counsel of his chief how they should be answered, but resolved himself what he should say.

Then he took up the papers on which the notices were set down and saw that this was written there—

“Lord Seaham—To ask if it is the intention of her Majesty’s Government to introduce a measure for the further amendment of the representation of the people in Parliament.”

Now it would be the business of his chief to answer to this; and so to make answer in the then temper of Parliament would not be a pleasant or an easy thing. But it would have come very easy to Massareene, if it had been his work to do it.

Then there was this inconvenient thing that a terrible Irishman was going to ask—

“Mr. O’Horrigan—To ask if the Government is prepared to advise her Majesty to visit her Irish subjects this autumn.”

Fabian Massareene was still the favourite, the followed minister, and of him it was intended this should be asked. Now he knew, of a certain knowledge, that to answer to this, as it could be only answered to them,

would provoke a very grave catastrophe; would be to lose the Irish Radical faction; and then that Irish faction was keeping in the Cabinet whenever it was threatened. Therefore he must keep the faction if he did not tell the truth. But he a little later bethought him that, if the Whigs were advised of the difficulty, Mr. O'Horrigan might be put off. So he sat him down and wrote this to the First Minister—

“O'Horrigan's question is really very awkward. Will it not be well if there is no House to-night?”

He knew that the timid chief would look upon this as an instruction, and that the order would go forth that there should be no House. An amiable nobleman was at the head of the Treasury; but Fabian Massareene was in command.

When this was presently sent off, he ran his eye over his tablet until he came to this which was entered there—“Lady Windermere's ball at 11.” “Yes,” he said, “I *must* be there. I have a question to put to Minna Norman.”

CHAPTER XI.

HOW THE PRIVY COUNCILLOR PUT THE
QUESTION.

IT was to the minds of many and great judges inconceivable that, up to the present, that up to the end of June, the affections, or the hand of Minna Norman had not been given away at Chiswick, or surrendered at Ascot. Of course, there was in this an opening for certain of them to say that perhaps, after all, she would not go off. Some girls, who were as well sought as she had been, carried themselves a little too high, and would look at strawberry leaves, but nothing else. It was very well, and showed excellent breeding to like strawberry leaves, but then it was not every girl who could get them. Notwithstanding this, some did

know that Minna Norman could have even gotten strawberry leaves. Therefore, as has been said, it was to many inconceivable why she had not taken them. Those, however, who professed that they understood the bearings of these things, were heard to observe that, whilst Minna Norman was a very sweet-looking girl, yet was she a little supercilious. And they were grieved because of this, for they feared aloud that it might stand in her way. The mother of the Lady Cecilia Carfax in this matter went further than all the rest, and she even said to her child in a hot-house at Chiswick that "the girl was very forward, and artful, and quite pushed herself into the notice of gentlemen." And the mother of the Lady Cecilia also said, before the day was over, and after that no one had come to lead her child about, that Miss Norman was "flaunting everywhere," and that she was a "horrid little minx." So it will be seen that the divisions of the ladies in respect to Minna ran a little high about the end of June.

Now, the true history of all that had so far befallen her is this. Minna Norman had indeed been sought of many, of many who came to her at Chiswick, and at Ascot, and at other places, bearing with them a great variety of professions. But then, their wooing, as might be learnt in some of their countenances, had in no way prospered. It is here protested that the mother of the Lady Cecilia was not a witness who witnessed without prejudice or passion, when she said very hardly indeed, at Chiswick, that "the girl was forward, and artful, and pushed herself into the notice of gentlemen." It was only this that caused Minna to say "No" to all of her pursuers—she had not put out of sight the memory of Guy Melchior's love. She had bethought her of the Vicar of Black Moss when it had even been told to her she might lie on strawberry leaves. Therefore, when that duke had asked of her to become his duchess, to take the place of some other duchesses that he had lost, it only set her thinking whether one hundred pounds a-year would not suffice

for two to live on. And this is the true story of her rejection of those strawberry leaves.

Then, too, it is not to be doubted but that an elderly earl of some substance, with languid digestion and of less character, had been thrice refused within a month; his astonishment at that which he heard becoming the greater over each refusal. Now had he drawn himself off; but this which had happened to him was not known of men or women. He would not have trusted any man with the knowledge of how this girl had answered to his questioning; and least of all would he have trusted any woman. So when he heard that it was said by some that the girl was perhaps a little bold and forward, he told how she had seemed to him not always altogether maidenly. And then after he had so cleared himself of this great lie, he went back to his mistresses, and to lay against his mare for the St. Leger.

After him, at grievous risk to his person, there came across to Minna from Boulogne the natural son of a marquis, to be only, how-

ever, as many times as unsuccessful as had been the earl before him. Nevertheless, the marquis's natural son did all his asking in a week, which, of course, might have shown his ardour to bear away her love, or he might also have understood the necessity there was for getting back where the awful mysteries of *ca-sa* could not move him. We shall see no more of this marquis's natural son; therefore, that which he said when he got back—as it did him so much honour—may be repeated here. He said it on the little pier which was the nearest he could safely be to England.

“What's the use of wanting to be steady? Don't I want to get out of this —— mess? Wouldn't I have paid everybody if I could have got her money, although it mightn't have left us a shilling?”

“It's deuced hard on a fellow,” said his friend, who was also at Boulogne for other than his health's sake, and who also desired to be reformed. And so they both meant to do thus nobly by any girl who could afford to work their reformation. But not-

withstanding the resolution come to by this aggrieved young man to pay everybody, it was perhaps, on the whole, as well that Minna Norman did not otherwise make answer to the marquis's natural son.

Therefore, after this sort, by the end of June, her suitors had so multiplied, and so threatened to go on multiplying, and were, the more eager and passionate of them, so little discouraged, that, at the last, Minna went in fear of every little note that she got, and of every thoughtful hint that she had better walk about outlying passages to get cool after she had danced; for after the reading of such little notes, and after being taken into such outlying passages, it had generally so happened that she had to say "No." But for all this did not Minna Norman exult over the conquests she had made, or set herself to cast up the great total of those she had sent away. Not but that there were those who said that she did exult, and did cast up; but then they never had little notes pressed into their hands to read; they were never invited into outlying

passages after they had danced, and were very hot. So they set themselves with one accord against Minna, because that they were not also led about to be asked momentous questions in a thorough draught.

Now Minna Norman could not herself at all understand how it could be, that in so short a time, she had become, as it so seemed, in such a high degree essential to the happiness of so many people. She could have wished to have known how many more of the like there were to come, that she might have offered to them all her thoughts, and have said to them assembled together, that whilst she was touched with every variety of their devotion, she had otherwise made choice. But then it was not possible that they could so be driven up to hear why she could not choose from amongst them. So it was not to be helped that they should make their speeches ; and at the last came the richest commoner in England to make his ; but he also got his answer, and seemed likely to be affected with a chronic astonishment at that which he heard. He had

indeed seen how it had fared with others, but then those others with whom it had fared so ill, were not one of them to be compared with him in the abundance of the things that they had got—therefore, when he too, had to fall back, he asked of himself whether she purposed going into something ecclesiastical and so making of herself a nun. If he was not fit to be taken, then was no man fit.

Now of course there were those to whom all this was quite intelligible ; and these, by much experience in the signs of such caprice, by the end of June were ready to interpret them. . . . Minna Norman was loved by, and returned the love of Fabian Massareene. This was how they read the reason of the dismissal of the duke, the marquis's natural son, the elderly earl, and the richest commoner. But the mother of the commoner, who had herself set on her son to ask so sweet a girl to share with him his love, and his thousand a day, with less of charity, and with proportionately more vexation, was now ready to solve the mystery of her son's

discomfiture by calling Minna names. And then she came up from Bath, that so unparalleled a thing might be investigated. So the investigation began : for the first night she went out with this work upon her hands, she sat by the side of the Lady Cecilia's mother. Now the Lady Cecilia's mother was undoubtedly a wallflower.

"I cannot understand why every man should be running after the girl," said the rich commoner's mother.

"I thought your son might have explained that," said the mother of the Lady Cecilia, smiling not a pleasant smile. She could not have anyhow refrained herself from this little speech. "I think she is quite plain, and she gives herself such airs ; but then, my Cecilia is so different to all other girls."

"But you see the Lady Cecilia has not been so tempted as has been Miss Norman ; and the girl is so much younger than your daughter."

The mother of the Lady Cecilia had fought a fight of her own provoking, and had got the worst of it : but then, although

sharp things had passed, they had been passed with smiles; and after this, between those two ladies there was peace.

"The girl has probably wagered," said the mother of the Lady Cecilia, "that the number of declarations in her first season would reach this or that unprecedented number: she brings men to her feet only to dismiss them with affected innocence. It is really quite shocking; she would do anything to add another conquest to the heap. I have heard of girls betting gloves about these things, but I never believed it could be so before."

"But who is she, or what is she?—for nobody seems to know."

"Who is she indeed?—There are all sorts of stories about her; but this seems pretty certain, that she is not what she pretends to be—that she is not the niece of Lady D'Aeth. It is said that her uncle is an undertaker. But I really know nothing about her."

So if she knew nothing, the mother of the richest commoner, who had come into

that place as an investigator, could gather nothing from sitting next to her; therefore she got up, and said behind her fan, "I think Lady D'Aeth exceedingly to blame. By-the-bye, was there not once something against this Lady D'Aeth?" And then she went her way.

When, however, the attentions of Massareene had come to be no longer masked; when the favourite minister was nearly always by her side; when the manner of his attentions at Ascot was recollected, and when he was very generally at the head of all her dance engagements, then did there cease to be any hesitation, amongst any of those who had been lookers on, in believing, with a fixed belief, that she had sent so many back for him. Nor was it even scrupled to be said that Minna Norman had made much open love to Fabian Massareene, to the great scandal of many, in divers public places, without any maidenly reserve. And these things, and more, were said of her by high Christian ladies, by those who knew how very falsely they had witnessed; but

who, nevertheless, would not have given up so witnessing, any more than they would have missed the assembling of themselves at church. But then such as were chiefly concerned in the circulation of these unworthy calumnies were yet very well able to know how much their own inventions had to do with their exceeding baseness. For neither by word, nor look, nor yet by anything that was not modest and maidenly, had Minna Norman given encouragement to the advances of Fabian Massareene. He did not think it was in any woman to say "no" to him; therefore he did not see that it was in Minna at any moment to say it. She was not demonstrative; but then demonstrative women had been always an affliction to him. He might have fancied that she held him, perhaps, a little off at such times as he was getting ready to tell her of the diamonds that he meant to put about her; but then that was only the more becoming in so sweet a girl. And so he reflected on what he was, and on where he could lead her; and then, as has been said, he

did not doubt but that she would wear the Massareene gems. Now if the minister, who had much wisdom of a different sort, could at all have persuaded himself that he might not be acceptable to every woman, he would have now been so persuaded. For it was very easy to be seen that Minna Norman went greatly, and constantly, in dread of being forced to hear those words which she felt would yet be spoken. Hitherto he had asked her nothing ; but then she could not say, for so it is not allowed amongst girls, "I know what you are meaning presently to ask of me ; do not drive me to tell you ; it is hopeless." The orderings of propriety forbade her to say this. And neither could she turn and tell him, "I have been asked of another to give to him this love that you are seeking ; to be to him all that you would have me be to you." No, she could not say that to him, or anything like to it, because he had not yet asked more of her than to be his partner in a ball-room ; because it would have been a capital offence against all the proprieties ; and because it would have been

but the beginning of a social resolution that might never have been stayed. Nor had Guy Melchior that afternoon under the beeches asked of her to be his wife.

Now there had been much weariness laid up for Minna Norman, in that unwise revealing by Guy Melchior of his love. Never had he been so weak before—so little sober—and there is some reason to believe that they yet did correspond—about parish matters. Massareene would not have felt so certain of his answer had he known about those letters. Minna Norman had, by the confession of the Vicar of Black Moss, been throughout the season in this strait. Her heart was occupied, and her hand was not engaged; but then, she did not think to charge Guy Melchior with that weariness which had come upon her, when she wrote those letters that she sent him every Wednesday. So those writings upon parish matters were sent out, and were answered, and it almost seemed as if the Vicar of Black Moss had, in this matter, clean forgotten what he was.

Whilst, therefore, in many high places,

scandal and scandalous surmisings were to the full engaged, Feodore Mounttrevor and Minna Norman never yet had met ; distant and formal bows had, indeed, on some occasions, been exchanged between the Lady Langdale and the Lady D'Aeth ; which bows on the part of the Countess had almost seemed to threaten something ; but neither side had proceeded further than to freezing outside courtesies. War might come from the Langdale side, but hitherto there had been peace.

Minna had scarcely set eyes on Feodore since that great morning in May ; for, truly, Lady Langdale's excellence of management was, in the ordering of all these considerable matters of jealousy and vindictiveness, not indifferently esteemed. It had risen to be a controlling power. She was the great oracle around whom all good haters came, and she had been that season continuously surrounded. From her youth up, her entering into a room had been a thing to be seen, had been a marvel of grace and dignity. But then, could she not by a look get out

of any room such as she was not well pleased should stop there? And, of the two, this was the grace that had brought to her the chiefest fame. Now she did not mean that her daughter should play second to any one; and instincts, which so dexterously a woman possesses in the highest degree, told her that Feodore would, of a certainty, have so to play such second in a company to Minna Norman. Therefore even as a prudent tradesman, before the prospect of an uncertain judgment retired his bill, did Lady Langdale retire her own child. More than once it had very nearly eventuated that they should pass the evening in the same society; but then at such an awkward crisis the experiences of Lady Langdale had been of infinite value; and by her superior manœuvering the hazardous meeting had been hitherto avoided. And then, too, as it was generally known of most where Minna and her aunt would pass the evening, Lady Langdale did not find it hard to take Feodore elsewhere.

Now all this was getting to be talked

about ; and one day, Lady D'Aeth, who had seen what was being done, could no longer hold her peace.

“ My dear Minna,” she said, “ this is really very weak of that excellent Lady Langdale : a tactician of such experience surely ought to know and see it is not wise to do as she is doing; and that it may become conspicuous. Everybody is asking where is the Lady Feodore Mounttrevor ; is she suppressed ? and why is she suppressed ? And that gives to ill-natured people, of which there are a great many, the opportunity of saying that which is, perhaps, a little true—that it would not be to the advantage of the Lady Feodore Mounttrevor to supply a contrast to Minna Norman.”

It was not judicious on the part of Lady D'Aeth to have so spoken ; but it came up from her heart, and it had been a long time asking to come, and it was scarcely a war speech, for she and Lady Langdale, as yet, were not at war. But then, to Minna Norman were all these sayings very grievous.

“ Oh ! aunt, do not tell me what they say.

How wicked it is of people to talk about such things!" And Minna Norman looked as if she could have cried.

Now is there reason to believe that Minna was being, after this sort schooled, in all the knowledge of a London season, to vastly little purpose, and with very mild success? The bitterness, and the anger, and the malice of the Lady Feodore Mounttrevor and her mother were to Minna Norman nothing at all like to a triumph, and very much like a trouble. She would a great deal the rather have been withheld herself than that this sorrow should have come upon another. It would have been to her a great joy could she have taken Feodore aside and gently have asked of her to do to her that which she might wish. It is greatly to be feared that Minna might even have got scratched; but this, of course, is in parenthesis.

So Minna seemed as if she could have cried, and then looked up sadly and plaintively at her aunt, and said, "I— I— Oh, mightn't I tell her, aunt, I was very sorry

she was so unhappy about me, and that I would like to go back to Black Moss, and never come here, or near to her again. I cannot bear that she should hate me."

And Minna Norman when she so spoke at her aunt's knee, was in no way acting—the hate of the beaten girl was not a pleasant thing to her. She was quite in earnest in wishing to be out of the midst of these things. But to Lady D'Aeth—even to the mother of Undine—such rare simplicity as this was very new, yet did it not seem the less priceless, and fresh, and beautiful. She had been a long time proud of that sweet, and lovely, and guileless girl; but never had she been so proud—so moved to a just pride as now. "Minna," she answered, passionately kissing her, "I begin to think I did not do the best for you in bringing you to this place, into the midst of these heartburnings and this evil-speaking—you were better in Black Moss than here. Whatever you, my darling, may say to Feodore Mounttrevor shall govern me. We will go away next week—at once, my sweet one, if it pleases you."

Minna knew it would have pleased her to go out of the stern life she was now in at once; but she did not start at the authority which her aunt had given her. She only came nearer and kissed the lips which spoke to her of liberty, and looked the gladness that she felt, but other than this she answered nothing.

“Then we will go to Lady Windermere’s to-night, Minna, and after to-night that excellent Lady Langdale shall have it all her own way, and reproduce her pretty Feodore, if so it pleases her. I thought better of her judgment than to make herself so foolish.” And then the chariot came round and they went out into Hyde Park, up and down the drive three times.

“Mamma, shall we go to Lady Windermere’s to-night?—I have been scarcely anywhere at all this season.”

“I cannot help that, Feodore. If people will ask that painted girl about, I do not choose that you should meet her. But I intend that you shall go to Lady Winder-



mere's, for, as you heard, Miss Norman is ill, and will not be there."

This was a hard saying from such lips, that Minna Norman was "that painted girl," but thereby did Lady Langdale feel much comforted, and relieved, and steadied. And then they, too, went out into the Park, up and down the drive, but for one turn only; for they had there seen the "painted girl," and therefore did the countess order the coachman to get into some other part.

Now, Lady Windermere's ball was to be a very great ball indeed. It had even, so soon as the cards were out, secured for itself a distinct and peculiar glory amongst the most brilliant assemblies of that season. And the assemblies of that season had gone beyond the assemblies of all other seasons. The earl's house in Piccadilly was then the Tory centre—the Whigs as they drove by it saw the many lights at the windows, but that was all they saw of the glories of the Windermere assemblies. Now, however, the countess's cards had been issued without

any political significance, very nearly to every member of the *haut ton* then in town. Lady Windermere had got to hear of Lady Langdale's palpitations, and sensations, and implacable resolves, at the first May drawing-room, and she had entirely entered into every circumstance of these very highly-bred rivalries ; for such had they seemed to be to her. Now, Lady Windermere was not set on making mischief ; that is, it did not come kindly to her to set people, even Whig people, by the ears. But, nevertheless, it did well please her to bring down a very little some very high lady. In this was she a very woman ; and it had long been on her mind to work out this passion on the Lady Langdale ; and now, she thought, the time had come when she could work it.

From the first beginning it had not been unobserved by her that Minna Norman and the Lady Feodore Mounttrevor were not given to the meeting of each other. The Countess of Windermere also had had daughters, therefore she knew something of the manner of these things ; and the manner

of this thing told to her why Feodore and Minna had not met. Such condolences, aggravating condolences, too, they almost seemed, as occurred to certain malevolents, had been offered in solemn form, and with irritating iteration, to Lady Langdale, so that after awhile she had almost shut herself up to be out of the way of them. And thus it was, in the end, that that which was administered, on the pretence of healing, had, as it worked, eaten in, and made wider the gaping and the festering wound. Now the Lady Windermere did have nothing to do with that festering wound. She had purposed in her heart, or it were perhaps better said, she had laid out all her consummate conciliatory art, upon achieving the meeting of the Lady Feodore Mounttrevor and Minna Norman some time on the floor of her drawing-room. She neither hoped nor intended to give pain ; but she bethought her that the Countess of Langdale was acting foolishly and weakly ; and Lady Windermere also was not sure but that her friend was acting sinfully and not as a high Christian lady

should be acting.—so she was minded to put an end to a very foolish and a very wicked business ; that was all.

Now this issue had been before attempted, impotently attempted, and had egregiously failed. But then, the wife of the Earl of Windermere—at the front of the fashionable world—was determined, come what might, to carry it through. And circumstances, as it so chanced, from the first were favourable.

Lady Langdale had been making a morning call on the earl's wife in Piccadilly. She had, indeed, come to see how the land lay for Feodore ; and she fell at once into the trap which was set for her, for Lady Windermere could see why her friend was there that morning. But then, the Lady Langdale did not know that she was going to be trapped.

“The new beauty, of course, will be here on Wednesday ?” And if she asked this, perhaps, a little awkwardly, yet, withal, was it asked pleasantly.

“I do not know that you need be afraid about that, Lady Langdale ; but it is a very

great disappointment to me that Lady D'Aeth only accepts for Miss Norman conditionally." Then, after this, which was strictly true, had been spoken, there was a little pause, so that the mother of the Lady Feodore might be moving to the trap. "Miss Norman will only be here if she should be sufficiently recovered from her present indisposition: oh, it is nothing serious; there is nothing disfiguring about it; it will not hurt her looks—but then the chicken-pox is so very much about just now."

Now, doubtless, this was said to punish her friend the Lady Langdale; and her friend *was* punished; and showed she did not like what she had got.

"I should be so sorry if it was anything to spoil her looks—shouldn't you, Feodore?"

"Yes, that I should, mamma."

Now as they are set down here, these two little speeches do not seem to have a true seeming about them. But when these two women had so spoken, they took courage and said more that cannot the better be explained. Between God and their consciences it must be left.

"The chicken-pox so seldom kills, and rarely even seams; let us trust it may pass off by Wednesday, Lady Windermere," said Lady Langdale, greatly concerned that the two convenient prerogatives of killing and pitting did not belong to the lighter epidemic. And so the Lady Langdale walked into the trap, and after that she and her child were driven away.

The footman had stood at the carriage door and touched his hat for his orders, and Lady Langdale had said, "Once round the Park, and then home." And then a little later she said to Feodore, quite shaking her little parasol, "The horrid pushing thing. I hope it will mark her for life. I see nothing about her but pertness and paint."

"And I am sure she pads, mamma."

"Oh, I dare say her figure is made up like the rest of her."

And of such was their talking till they got back to Belgrave Square.

That afternoon Lady Windermere drove to Lady D'Aeth's, to see for herself what was the nature and the severity of Minna

Norman's attack ; for now was she not lightly resolved that the meeting of the two young girls should be at her own ball. And when she had got there she heard from Lady D'Aeth's own lips that Minna's very slight indisposition had come only from fatigue, and that with a little rest there would be no cause for her to stay away from the great gathering at Windermere House.

"Then I shall quite expect to see you, Miss Norman, and you must not disappoint me ;" and she kissed Minna—it was a pleasant, motherly kiss—after which she rose to go, and the bell was rung.

"Don't be late, for I want to introduce Miss Norman to my son before his hands are full ;" and then she pressed Minna by the hand, and got into her carriage and was driven back.

Now Lord Rothay was her eldest son, and in the driving back she put to herself some questions concerning Minna and her son. The earl was set on a political alliance ; but then the countess did not mean that there should be one.

"The two girls will meet on my floor,

and I shall see it. I hope Feodore won't scratch. I think I have contrived it excellently." And after that she thought of Minna Norman and her son dancing together, till she got to Piccadilly.

The police regulations in regard to the great festivities at Windermere House were made special, to avoid confusion ; for it was known even to them how grand a thing this meeting of the Tories and the Whigs, on Tory ground, would be. Carriages continued the work of setting down till some time past midnight, for the going very late was just then coming in. It was presently an immense assembly. It almost seemed like a manifesto put out by the opposition, through the wife of their chief, to show how little they were out of heart. Nothing of the sort, as a success, had ever towered above this. But then, in her great tact, was not Lady Windermere supreme ?

When Minna Norman, shortly after eleven, came into the room, the brilliancy of the season had, in the bewildering scene before her, reached its climax. Even the Whigs were heard to say that their

managing lady could not have done it better. And presently this was also said by the managing lady of the Whigs herself. And Lady Windermere, who was greatly given to the doing of such things, would have her kiss of Minna as though it had been only a gathering of people come together in a friendly way ; for her heart went with her even to the best *réunions*. Then, too, she fetched Lord Rothay, her son, and desired him to dance with Minna Norman.

“ You have heard of the beautiful Miss Norman, and she is as nice as she is beautiful. She would make you a very dear little wife, that’s what I think, Arthur.” And so did she dismiss Lord Rothay to his work.

A little later, and Minna Norman found herself engaged for every dance that was set down to be danced. So that unless she broke faith with some, she would have to stay there till it should be far in the morning. Lord Rothay, too, had done his best, not only because the girl with whom he danced was beautiful, but because he knew the eye of his mother was upon him. And

when he had led her to her seat he asked to dance with her again, and was answered favourably—all of which did Lady Windermere think seemed to promise well.

As Minna presently moved up the room on the arm of an ex-Tory secretary, she chanced to overhear that her own name was the subject of some very earnest conversation. And then she also heard the name of Lady Feodore Mounttrevor, and then in a whisper, too, the words, "They have met, then, at last."

Now these whispered words, "They have met, then, at last," were the words of a peeress who had done her duty in the marrying of eight daughters, and all of them to eldest sons. Therefore she now conceived she had a right to be heard upon every social thing.

Then one who sat next to her, who had two girls, and had not married either, answered, "It was very foolish of Lady Feodore to risk the contrast. I always thought her mother was a better manager;" which was a hard and an unwise thing to be said by one who had herself

not better managed for her own two daughters.

This, and more like to it, was what Minna Norman was forced unwillingly to hear as she passed up the room; and therefore she was glad when she could get out of the hearing of it all, and was led to a seat by the side of her aunt.

Now Lady D'Aeth also knew what had happened, and she said, "Feodore is here, my love; every one is talking of it; but of course you have seen her, though Lady Langdale, it would seem, does not wish to see me."

"Then why don't you go and say something to her, aunt? Show her that you do not mind."

Lady D'Aeth was not given to be stiff, or to begrave over the proprieties. But had not Lady Langdale's conduct all along been foolish and rude; and had not this discourtesy now proceeded to a cut? No; if she said something, it would be something of the hardest, and then there might be railing for railing; and moreover, Lady D'Aeth did greatly mind this which was put upon her.

“No, my love, that cannot be; I know what is due to myself, and it would make her worse were she to think I sought her. Yet would I shake her by the hand this minute if she offered hers.” And then nothing more was said about it.

Feodore Mounttrevor had been led up to her seat, and after a little while she was glad that sultry night to get into the cooler air of the covered balcony, out of the suffocating heat of the ball-room. There she had sat alone for some time, busied as it seemed with the choice flowers of the bouquet in her hand. As she so sat on, she saw that some one had also entered and was coming near her. And then when she glanced up, Minna Norman stood before her.

She started with an angry exclamation, and a withering look of utter scorn from her beautiful and flashing eyes, and would likely have swept Minna away—bodily away, even to her oversetting in that balcony—had not Minna timidly and calmly murmured this beginning—

“I am come,” she said, “to ask you not to be any more unhappy about me. I want

to tell you how sorry I am that anything which I have done has given you pain—I——”

“You have said enough. I desire that you will no further dare address me. Do you hear? Let me pass.”

“Oh, Lady Feodore! I think you cannot know me;” and she almost knelt at the feet of the embittered girl, and she still stayed there beseechingly before her.

The look which flashed from the face of Feodore Mounttrevor was, as she heard these words, like to some gesture borrowed from a fiend.

“I know you, as all the world now knows you, as the drab of an undertaker; and I wish to know no more of such a line. Let me pass, I say. You shall not hold me here.”

But even before an insult such as was this, did Minna Norman's sweet and unruffled gentleness keep the ground; and though the threatening girl stood almost over her, she did not shrink from what she meant to do.

“Lady Feodore, it is because I do not wish to be standing in your way, either

here or elsewhere, that I have thought to come and say what I am saying now, for I cannot any longer bear to feel that my presence is so unbearable to Lady Langdale and yourself. Indeed, I do not think that any one ever hated me before. I never meant to make you so unhappy about me."

"Do not persist in this impertinent mistake. Your presence anywhere is not recognised by *my* mamma, and is not noticed by me. You must surely forget yourself, and that your uncle is——. Let me pass, or others shall remove you."

So as she hissed these threats and insults out, was she pushing Minna Norman back; but so was she not pushing back Minna's resolution.

"Oh, don't make me more wretched than I am, for you will never see me anywhere again. I am going away next week for ever. Aunt says I may, for I cannot any longer bear these things. Do, do speak something kind to me before I go."

Now it is not intended that anything should be overstated here ; therefore it must be said that Feodore Mounttrevor had, after all, been only educated up to speaking and thinking so very bitterly. She would not have so spoken or so thought but for her mother. Her mother would not let her be as God had made her ; for which thing she will have presently to answer ; but then that is her business and not ours. So the chiefest part of her deformity was acquired. In her heart of hearts all was not dark ; and what there was of light Minna had reached to now.

There are some things too sacred to be written down. And so was the sacred fight that Feodore Mounttrevor fought with her better self in that balcony that night. Too sacred ! for was not that Father other than the earl covering her with strength, and showing her the way to stand ? But the issue of that fighting, to her honour, must not be hidden here. It is told then in these words. She did not call on any one to sweep Minna Norman from her path. She gave

her hand as a true girl—for Minna had conquered.

The leaders of both parties, by this hour of the night, had come upon the ground. As it was nearing towards twelve the name of Fabian Massareene was brought up, and delivered by the chief proclaimer at the doors.

When the favourite minister found himself, at length, by Minna's side, he, to himself, cursed his folly for being so late. For every dance set down he found she was engaged. She would not be free if she stayed on till the fourth or fifth small hour. Therefore, as has been said, to himself he cursed. Nor did his face, even with all the practised indifference that hitherto it had assumed at pleasure, conceal the extent of his discomfiture; and many mothers there were, stately matrons of the highest sort, who saw what his discomfited face reflected, and were glad. He had never asked their girls to dance: their girls who knew the latest steps. Therefore were they glad.

But then Fabian Massareene had come to

put a question that night which he did not mean should go unasked merely because of trifles ; and so he seized upon a trifle which seemed to be his opportunity.

A few minutes after midnight he was leading Minna Norman to the ice room. They were alone on those splendid stairs. And there was no one in the long corridor beyond the stairs.

“I am so glad that aunt says this may be my last ball, Mr. Massareene. We are going back to Black Moss next Monday.”

Now he was not at all prepared for this ; and there was that in his manner when he heard it, which confessed that he was taken by surprise. Therefore when they had reached the middle of the corridor he stopped, and he took her hand, and said passionately, for he *was* in earnest now, “Miss Norman—Minna, I am here to-night to ask you to consent to be my wife. I am here to ask you, can you love me?”

It was well and neatly done, and he thought that she would have the diamonds. She had always feared that it would some

time come to this ; and yet now that it had come, the words she wished to speak would scarcely leave her tongue. She struggled to withdraw the hand which he had taken. She was only concerned so to order her answer as to tell him the whole truth ; and she would have well liked to have done this and yet not have pained him. But, before all, she did not mean to tell him there was any hope when there was none. And she said, " No, I can never love you, Mr. Massareene." There was nothing more spoken between them in that corridor. She took his arm, and they went on where the rest had gone before them to get cool. The privy councillor had put his question, and had got his answer ; and the next moment he was bringing to her wafers and a water ice.

Guy Melchior ! priest of Black Moss upon one hundred pounds a year ; she said that she could never love that man for memory of you.







